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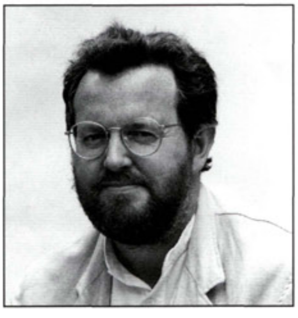
Japanese Castles in Korea 1592–98



Stephen Turnbull • Illustrated by Peter Dennis



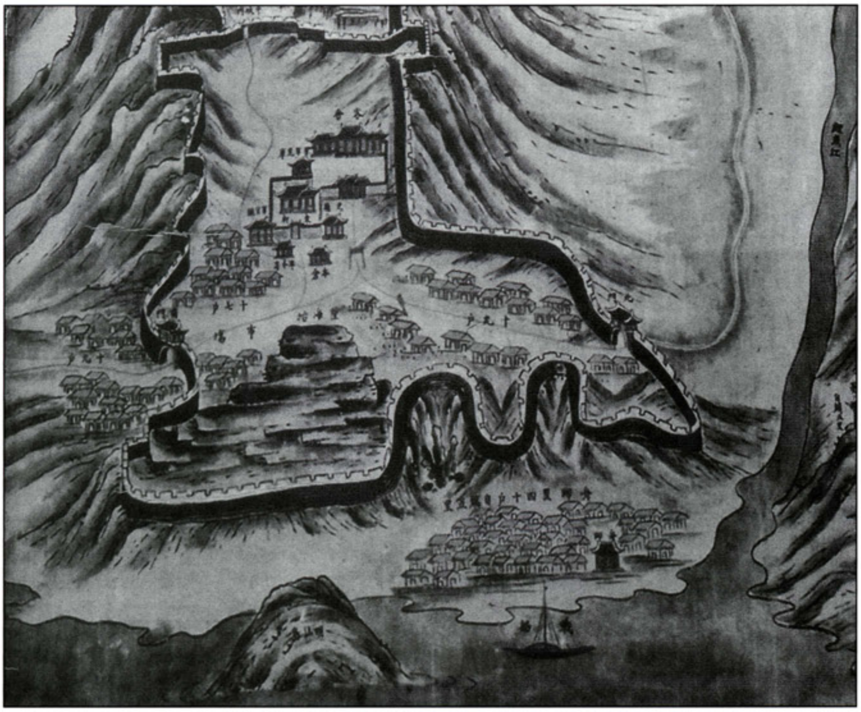
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Fortress • 67

Japanese Castles in Korea 1592–98



Stephen Turnbull • Illustrated by Peter Dennis
Series editors Marcus Cowper and Nikolai Bogdanovic

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Author's dedication

To Sue Brayshaw.

Artist's note

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Preface

The southern coastline of the Republic of Korea is noted for its jagged cliffs, its secluded coves and its intricate waterways dotted with myriad islands. Here and there, usually on mountaintops overlooking sheltered harbours, lie the forgotten ruins of ancient fortresses, their solid stone walls overgrown with ivy. These abandoned castles are the sole physical survivors of a short but terrible war when Japan sought to occupy Korea as a preliminary to a grandiose scheme to conquer China. To safeguard their communications the Japanese built these coastal fortresses; called in Korean *waeseong* and in Japanese *wajo* – 'the castles of the people of *wa*' – *wa* being an ancient name for Japan.

Although some of the *wajo* sites have been partially restored, most are completely derelict, and many disappear altogether every summer under a blanket of unchecked foliage. Some Koreans regard them as an unwelcome reminder of a time of colonial oppression, while others see their ruined forms as symbols of the power of the Korean people to successfully resist an invader. Yet their neglected sites, where uneven paths provide the only access and Korean farmers grow vegetables, have ensured the survival of the *wajo* as uniquely important military fossils. During the early 17th century, castles in Japan itself had graceful keeps and towers built on top of their characteristically massive stone bases, a process that often obscured their original military functions. The *wajo* saw no such alteration, and now offer a valuable insight into the original designs and functions of Japanese castles during the age of the great civil wars.

The era of the *wajo* was therefore both brief and violent. My previous book in Osprey's Fortress Series, Fortress 57: *The Great Wall of China 221 BC–AD 1644* (Osprey Publishing Ltd: Oxford, 2007) dealt with a fortified structure that encompassed a millennium and a half of construction history and saw military action as late as 1945. In marked contrast, the time span of the Japanese fortresses in Korea from their initial construction to their total abandonment lasted scarcely six years. Yet in that short space of time they experienced as much fighting as the Great Wall of China did in the whole of its 2,000-year-long history.

This book provides the first complete account in English of the *wajo*, a topic I touched upon briefly in my earlier work *Samurai Invasion: Japan's Korean War 1592–1598* (Cassells: London, 2002). Since researching that book I have benefited from much new material on the *wajo* and have been able to correct several errors of nomenclature and location. Thirty sites in all have now been identified, all of which are covered here. Many *wajo* have been excavated in recent years, and I wish to express my thanks to Kuroda Keiichi, who has been personally responsible for the archaeological study of several sites; and whose organization, the Wajo Kenkyu Kai, has published detailed survey reports over the past decade. He has generously made these available to me, and they were to prove vital in directing my own fieldwork visits to the *wajo* sites between 1997 and 2005. All the maps and diagrams have appeared in the Wajo Kenkyu Kai's journal *Wajo no Kenkyu*. Using Kuroda's maps and reconstructions I was able to locate, visit and photograph all the major surviving *wajo*; and also to study from a distance other sites where very little survives to indicate that an apparently undistinguished hill once housed a colonial fortress designed to act as a military outpost of an empire that never was.

A note on Romanization

In this book I have adopted the system of Romanization of the Korean alphabet that was officially introduced by the South Korean government in 2000. In essence the new system has got rid of the apostrophe and the semicircular accent. Consequently the *wajo* of Ungch'uŏn, as it appears in *Samurai Invasion* is now written Ungcheon. This has two advantages: first because sometimes the accented mark was omitted altogether, meaning that different places were written in the same way. More important is the fact that since 2002 the road signs in Korea, all of which are now written in both the Korean script and the Romanized alphabet, use the new system. The same applies to all English-language maps and tourist information, so a visitor using this book will not get lost! One disadvantage lies in the sad loss of a few names made familiar in the Korean War such as in the replacement of Pusan by Busan, and Kŏjedo by Geojedo, but reference to the maps enclosed in this book should avoid any confusion. As these changes have not been applied in North Korea any references to places in North Korea have been left in the familiar form. To aid clarity all accents have been omitted from Japanese words as well.



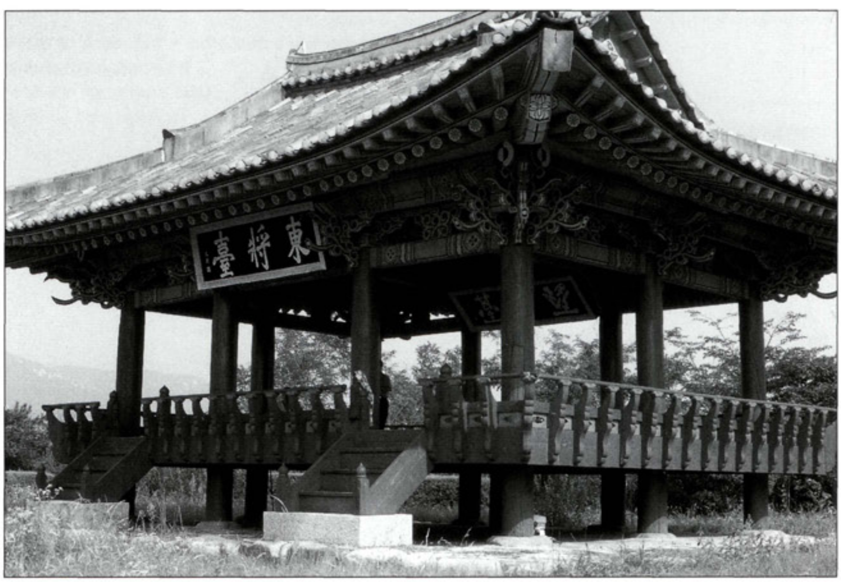
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Introduction: the very short history of the *wajo*

The invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597, the attempt at occupation between those two dates and the desperate rearguard action late in 1598 together make up a military operation unique in Japanese history. Apart from numerous pirate raids on China and Korea, some of which were very large in scope, and the annexation of Ryukyu (modern Okinawa prefecture) by the Shimazu clan in 1609, the Korean expedition remains the only occasion within a period of 1,000 years during which the destructive energies of the samurai (Japan's warrior class) were expended on a foreign country.

Japan's Korean expedition – known to Koreans as the Imjin War – was also the last military campaign to be set in motion by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), and was to prove a disastrous end to the glorious military career of a brilliant general who is regarded as Japan's equivalent of Napoleon Bonaparte. Having risen from the lowest ranks through a mixture of skill and opportunistic cunning, Hideyoshi was adored by his subordinates, who served him with a keen loyalty to a 'soldiers' general' that transcended the legendary fidelity expected of a samurai. In this Hideyoshi had set them a fine example when he served as the most loyal and talented member of the inner circle of generals under Japan's first unifier, Oda Nobunaga (1534–82). Nobunaga, an early enthusiast for the firearms introduced from Europe in 1543, had transformed Japanese warfare, and had taken the first steps towards reuniting the country from the patchwork of competing petty *daimyo* (feudal warlords) whose squabbles had given the age the name of the *Sengoku Jidai*, the Age of Warring States.

When Nobunaga was murdered in 1582, Toyotomi Hideyoshi became his avenger, and by a series of rapid offensives overcame his fellow generals to inherit Nobunaga's former domains. Three massive campaigns followed: the invasion of the island of Shikoku in 1585; the conquest of the island of Kyushu in 1587; and the defeat of the powerful Hojo family near modern Tokyo in 1590. Within a year all the other *daimyo* had submitted to him, so that by 1591 Japan was reunited under the son of a peasant.



The Korean-style pavilion on the summit of the hill on which Dongnae *wajo* was built.



The *wajo* of Yangsan as viewed from the modern bridge over the Nakdong River near the foot of the hill on which was built the *wajo* of Hopo. Hopo shared with Yangsan the defence of the Nakdong above Busan. Yangsan *wajo* was built along the ridge of the two prominent hills in the middle distance.

If Hideyoshi had been content to stop there his place in Japanese history would have been assured. But his campaigns of the 1580s had involved the successful deployment of armies numbered in many tens of thousands and their safe transport by sea. By 1591 everything looked possible to him, even the conquest of China, a dream that he had entertained for several years. Geography, if nothing else, suggested that to carry out such an outrageous scheme – which would have to be aimed at Beijing, the capital of the Ming dynasty – a Japanese invasion would have to proceed via the Korean Peninsula. When the Korean king refused to allow the Japanese unimpeded progress through his country the planned Chinese war became a Korean war.

The invasion of Korea took place in May 1592 and involved an uninterrupted crossing of the sea via the islands of Iki and Tsushima. The first shots of the campaign were fired against the fortress guarding the harbour of Busan, a castle that would one day become one of the most important Japanese *wajo*. From here the First Division under Konishi Yukinaga proceeded northwards, taking two other future *wajo* at Dongnae and Yangsan. The Second Division under Kato Kiyomasa followed them along this route, while Kuroda Nagamasa's Third Division landed further to the west across Busan's great natural moat of the Nakdong River and captured Gimhae, another site that was to become a Japanese strongpoint.

A rapid advance followed, and within a few days Seoul, the Korean capital, had fallen to the Japanese. A delay at the Imjin River allowed the Korean king to escape to the Chinese border, but not long afterwards Konishi Yukinaga occupied Pyongyang, while Kato Kiyomasa set off on a campaign to pacify the north-east and to cross into Manchuria. The successful conquest of Korea was reported back to a satisfied Toyotomi Hideyoshi (who never left Japan during the entire campaign), and plans were rapidly drawn up for the occupation of Korea, the allocation of territory, the drafting of tax rolls and its inhabitants' incorporation under Hideyoshi's hegemony in much the same way that the Japanese *daimyo* had submitted to him in 1591.

It was at that point that the counterattack began, and Pyongyang, captured so easily by Konishi Yukinaga, was destined to be Japan's last outpost on the road to China. Three developments were to thwart Hideyoshi's dream of conquest.

The first was the activity of Korean guerrillas, who were drawn from the shattered remnants of the army and fought under newly inspired leaders. The second was the series of naval victories won by the renowned Admiral Yi Sunsin, whose heavily armed 'turtle ships' destroyed many Japanese vessels and disrupted communications with Japan. The third, and ultimately the most important development, was the intervention of Ming China. In a battle that was to prove the major turning point in the war Pyongyang was recaptured in February 1593. From this moment on the Japanese were involved in a fighting retreat. By the autumn of 1593 their invading armies had evacuated Korea, leaving behind a handful of garrisons to 'occupy' their remaining toehold on Korea's south coast. The fortresses from which this defiant illusion was to be maintained for the next five years were the first of the *wajo*.

Map of the southern part of South Korea showing the locations of the *wajo* 1592–98.





The site of the *wajo* of Ulsan today, looking across the river from the south. The Japanese-style stone walls are obscured by the dense foliage. Ulsan marked the eastern end of the line and was incomplete when attacked by the Ming in 1598.

A second invasion of Korea was launched in 1597. The main attacks were carried out to the west of the existing *wajo*, and the Japanese armies initially enjoyed a similar success to 1592. But this time the reverse was much swifter in coming, and the Japanese were to be on the defensive for most of the second campaign. A decisive intervention from China soon forced the Japanese back to the *wajo* line, which was extended westwards to Suncheon and eastwards to Ulsan. Ulsan was Japan's last *wajo* to be built, and was still unfinished when a Ming army attacked it in an epic siege early in 1598. Three other Chinese attacks followed later in the year. Two were launched against the *wajo* of Sacheon and Suncheon while another attempt was made against Ulsan, but before these operations were even under way Toyotomi Hideyoshi died peacefully in his sleep. The governing council who were to rule Japan during the minority of his son Hideyori decided to make a final withdrawal from Korea, but this did not happen before massive Chinese assaults were beaten off from these three key *wajo*. Almost the last Japanese contingent to leave Korea turned out to be the one under the command of Konishi Yukinaga, who had led the first assault in 1592. He first rescued some soldiers and sailors isolated in the *wajo* of Namhae by Korea's last naval victory at Noryang, and then supervised the evacuation of Busan. The last members of the invading army arrived back in Japan to hear the stunning news that their great leader was dead. Hideyoshi's dreams of conquest had died with him, leaving behind a devastated land and a line of abandoned castles that were to become the monuments of a lost empire.

Design and development

The Korean fortification tradition and its shortcomings

The *wajo* were castles built entirely in the Japanese style, a way of constructing fortresses – unique to that country – that was labour intensive, time consuming and architecturally demanding. The decision to reject the simpler native Korean style, which would have been easier and quicker to construct, was made by the invading generals based upon their experience of two years of warfare in Korea and their observations of the Korean fortresses that they had overcome.

There was certainly no shortage of examples for them to study, because the land that the Japanese invaded in 1592 was a country of fortresses. They fell into two categories. Like China and unlike Japan, Korean towns and cities had walls round them. These enclosed areas were called *eupseong*, and some had been built as a response to the Japanese *wako* (pirate) raids. Also, many mountaintops sported isolated mountain castles called *sanseong*, written using the same Chinese characters as the Japanese *yamashiro*.

It was the latter type of fortification that formed the main plank of the Korean government's defensive plan when the Japanese invasion appeared imminent. When danger threatened the principle was to be 'strengthen the walls and clear the countryside'. It was a curious policy decision that dated from the time of the *wako* and did not mean that the peasants would simply move within the nearest *eupseong*. Instead they were to head for the distant *sanseong*. Anyone who failed to comply would be liable for arrest and execution on the grounds of collaboration with the Japanese. What happened was that because the *sanseong* were so far away, when a raid began the peasants buried everything in the nearby hills and waited in their villages for the Japanese to arrive, plunder and depart.

This bizarre situation had produced one unfortunate outcome even before the war started, because the peasants were so suspicious of the *sanseong* they failed to respond to commands to repair and maintain them. Men were frequently called out for ten weeks of work, but their lack of skills meant that their efforts began to collapse almost as soon as they left. As a result the neglected and crumbling *sanseong* became even less attractive as a refuge, and when the 1592 invasion began the rapid Japanese advance caught the peasants undefended. Because the Korean army largely abandoned the towns for the *sanseong* the important population centres were lightly defended, leaving the main communication routes through Korea virtually unprotected. And this time, of course, the Japanese robbers did not simply plunder and withdraw.

This is not to say that the Korean *sanseong* suffered only from bad workmanship. They also had built-in design faults of which the Koreans themselves were acutely aware. The statesman Yu Seongnyong greatly admired the work of Qi Jiguang, the Chinese general who had fought the *wako* and then gone to be the chief architect of the Great Wall of China. Yu despaired when he compared his own countrymen's pathetic efforts to Qi's magnificent creation for the Ming emperors. Instead of thinking about the best location of their walls the Korean builders just followed the shape of the mountains and mountain paths to create a pastiche of the Great Wall where the turrets were too low to provide cover for their defenders, who had to crouch or lie down to move from place to place. There were no proper gun emplacements, the gaps in the parapet were wide enough to let an attacker climb in with ease, and there

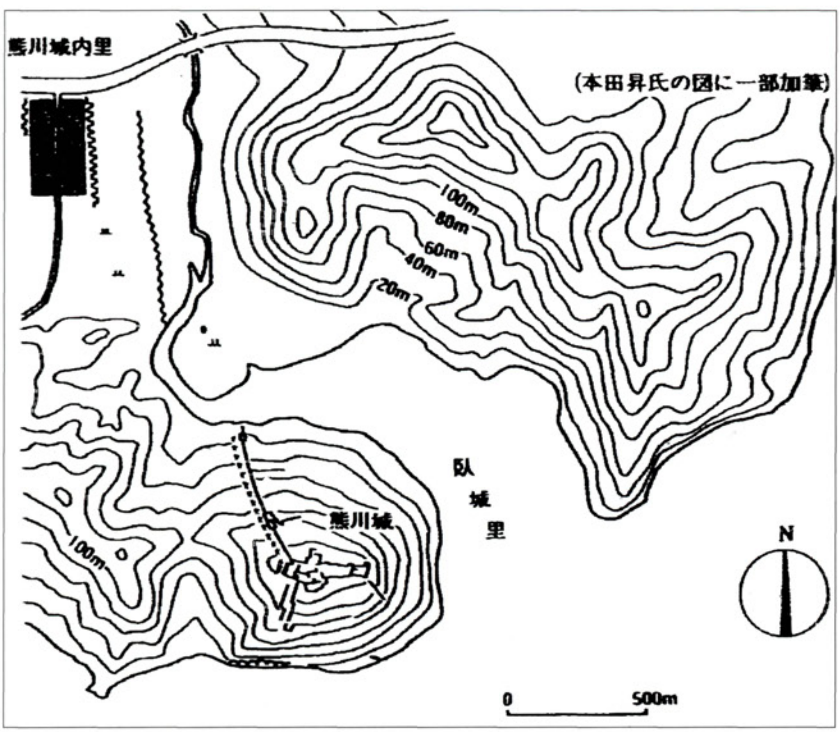
was no provision for crossfire and no loopholes. The stonework was also poor, leaving the walls prone to collapse or to destruction by an attacker.

Similar problems beset many of the town *eupseong*, with well-constructed walls being found only in major locations such as Busan, Jinju or Namweon. Here might be found gently sloping stone walls with neatly mortared joints, well-defended parapets and strong Chinese-style gateways, often consisting of an arched tunnel through the wall surmounted by a wooden pavilion, but most *eupseong* were much simpler and resembled a *sanseong* built on flat ground with straight walls. They may have withstood a *wako* raid, but were useless when faced with a full-scale invasion.

Yu's pessimism about the weakness of traditional Korean military architecture was borne out within minutes of the Japanese landfall in Busan. Busan Castle, an extension of the city wall on the edge of the sea, was in fact one of the best examples of a Korean fortress, but the Japanese were under the command of So Yoshitoshi, whose connections with Korea, facilitated by the location of his fief on Tsushima Island, must have given him an inside knowledge of the weakness of Korean castles and how to exploit them. The Japanese filled the moat with rocks and timber and climbed up scaling ladders under cover of a hail of bullets from thousands of arquebuses. When Kuroda Nagamasa attacked Gimhae shortly afterwards he filled the moat with bundles of cut barley. Dongnae, a *sanseong* a few miles to the north of Busan, proved no safer than Busan's *eupseong*, and when the Japanese reached Yangsan a few volleys from the massed arquebuses were enough to cause the defenders to flee. To Hideyoshi's men the Korean fortress network looked like a pushover.

Adopt, adapt, improve – the first Japanese castles in Korea

As the Japanese raced for the capital the Korean fortresses fell before them like houses of cards, and in the optimistic climate that followed the fall of Seoul, Ukita Hideie, the 'Supreme Commander of Japanese Forces in Korea', established a line of communication forts between Busan and Pyongyang. For speed and



A sketch map of Ungcheon harbour, showing the relationship between the original Korean *eupseong* (fortified town) that was rejected by the Japanese, and the *wajo* that was built on the promontory overlooking the sea at the harbour mouth.



A distant view of Busan looking north showing the hill on which Jaseongdae was built. The castle site is the first of the green hills visible between the buildings.

convenience he did this by placing Japanese garrisons inside the captured Korean fortresses. The new occupiers of Korea were so confident of their continued success that the tactical weaknesses of the castles that their own armies had so recently exposed gave them no immediate cause for concern. The castle commanders were even allowed to have concubines with them, and a Korean attack on the castle of Yongin seemed only to confirm this optimistic view when Wakizaka Yasuharu led a contingent out of the gate and frightened the attackers away.

Yet as the months went by two ominous developments threatened their sense of security. First, Admiral Yi Sunsin's naval victories meant that the Japanese advance north of Pyongyang was stalled partly owing to a lack of support by sea. Although these battles happened far from the inland communication castles, the news inevitably reached their commanders, but of more immediate concern to the castle garrisons were the attacks they were now experiencing from guerrilla bands. In spite of the Japanese superiority with hand-held firearms, these sudden raids vividly exposed the inherent weaknesses of the Korean fortresses, and the Korean guerrillas began to knock holes in the Japanese land communications as efficiently as Admiral Yi was disrupting their communications by sea.

One operation is of particular interest. This was the action conducted against the fortress of Mugye, which lay where the Japanese line actually crossed the Nakdong to the west of Daegu. The interesting point is that Mugye was not a former Korean possession, but a castle newly built by the Japanese commander Mori Terumoto. In this sense Mugye was technically the first *wajo*, and was built at about the time of Japan's first defeat on land at the battle of Euryeong, although we do not know whether or not Mugye was built in the Japanese style. Its garrison held off one assault by Korean volunteers soon after it was completed, but several months later Mugye was abandoned in the face of another Korean attack.

It would, however, be incorrect to conclude that the subsequent creation of the *wajo* in a purely Japanese style was solely due to the bruising experiences in attack and defence that the Japanese had been through in 1592. Certainly the Korean fortresses had fallen easily to Japanese firepower. Certainly some Japanese-occupied Korean fortresses had then fallen or been abandoned to the Koreans, but there were several instances when Korean fortresses had resisted massive Japanese attacks. The classic example is the first siege of Jinju, with its high walls and strong gates, which was defended successfully in Korea's greatest land victory of the war. The conclusion might therefore have been reached that Korean castles could be strong enough for Japanese purposes provided they

were properly defended. But that was not the conclusion that was drawn, and this came about because of what happened during the first few days of 1593.

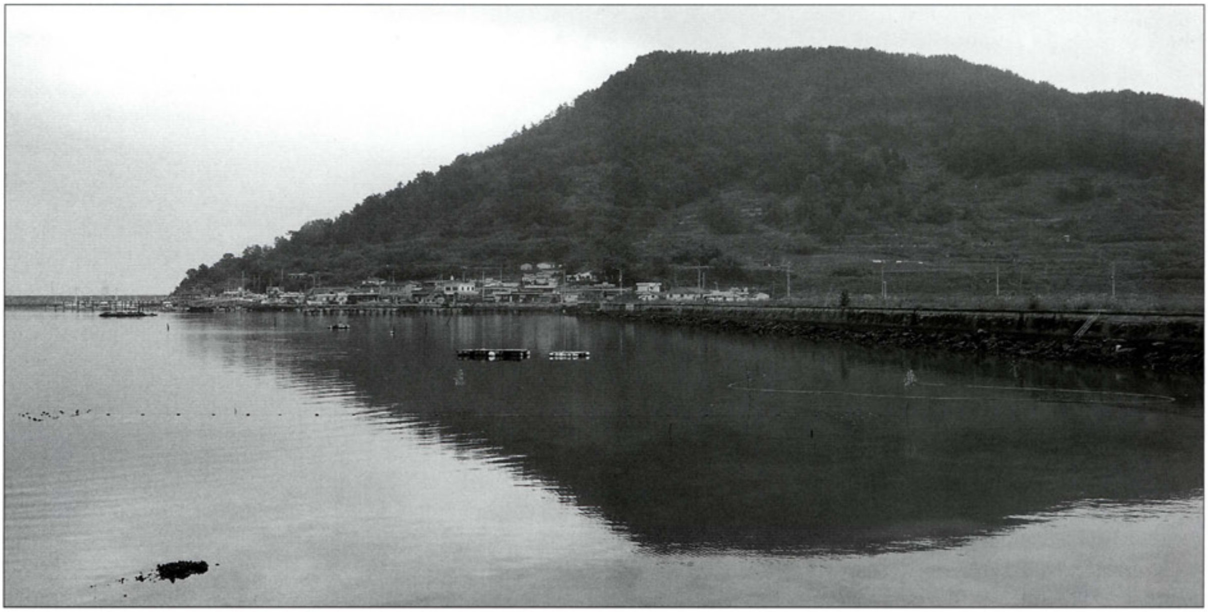
On 5 January 1593 the vanguard of the Ming Army crossed the Yalu River with a mission to liberate Korea. The winter was regarded as an ideal time for campaigning because the frozen ground allowed the Chinese to transport their artillery with ease. The Koreans warned them of the reverses they had suffered from the Japanese firearms, but the Chinese general Li Rusong replied, 'Japanese weapons have a range of a few hundred paces while my great cannon have a range of five or six *li* (about 2.5km). How can we not be victorious?' It was a prophetic statement, because the liberation of Pyongyang by the Ming was the turning point in the Korean invasion, and set in motion a Japanese retreat interrupted by a handful of rearguard victories. The *wajo* line was essentially a response to the Chinese advance, and provided the last refuge for the occupying troops. The new fortresses may have had roles concerned with communications and harbour defence, but the principle underlying their creation was that of providing a final toehold on the Korean Peninsula.

The creation of the *wajo*

In the furious building programme that established the *wajo* line, some castles were created by rebuilding Korean fortresses that already enjoyed an important strategic location. Others were completely new projects, such as Ungcheon, which was built on a mountain overlooking the harbour about a mile from the weak Ungcheon *eupseong*. Admiral Yi was particularly impressed by Ungcheon, and noted that: 'The enemy had built long walls on the eastern and western mountainsides where he took up positions planted with multi-coloured war banners, and rained gunfire towards us in a haughty manner.' Yi Sunsin in fact raided Ungcheon four times, but as his ship-to-shore bombardment was not supported by land operations no real damage was done either to the Japanese soldiers or to their building programme. 'The enemy battalions hide themselves in fortifications and will not come out' wrote Yi, thereby summing up the Japanese High Command's current strategic mentality for the entire fortified line.



The hill of Jaseongdae as seen from the roof of the Kukje Hotel, looking south. Part of the inner harbour of Busan lies behind.



The dramatic promontory on which the *wajo* of Ungcheon was built, viewed from across the strategic harbour that the *wajo* defended so well. The mouth of the harbour has now been partially closed owing to the extensive land reclamation works around Ungcheon.

Yi Sunsin also recorded a great deal of activity round the ports, but misunderstood its purpose. He thought that what he was witnessing was an operation designed to cover a complete Japanese withdrawal, and accordingly held back from any major attack until the transports began to sail back to Japan. He would then engage them at sea and inflict huge damage. But intelligence brought to him by a number of escaped Korean prisoners of war painted a very different picture and finally convinced him. 'The enemy is increasing in number and he is building bunkers and spreading tents twice as much as before' reported one man. Another noted the transport of 'war provisions and clothing from Japan'. Yi sadly concluded that 'he is going to spend another winter in our country, to our great mortification'. The loyal admiral was correct in his conclusion, but would have been even more mortified had he known that it was not one more year that the Japanese would stay, but five.

By the end of 1593 at least 18 out of the final 30 *wajo* had been created to secure the Japanese gains. The castle that lay furthest to the east was mighty Seosaengpo, with two other coastal forts, Imrangpo and Gijang, lying back towards Busan, where four *wajo* defended Busan harbour and the strategic Dongnae, built over a Korean site, lay just inland. Gimhae Jukdo and its dramatically situated subsidiary Gupo covered the Nakdong River just above Busan. The important waterway between Geoje Island and the mainland, a sea area plagued by Admiral Yi, was defended by three *wajo* on Geoje Island, two on Gadeok Island and four (Ungcheon, Myeongdong, Jama and Angolpo) on the mainland. These, with the addition of a few minor support castles, sufficed for the time of the Japanese occupation between 1593 and 1597.

The second invasion of Korea in 1597 was launched with the help of the existing *wajo* bases, and was directed at the 'virgin territory' of Jeolla Province. The capture of Namweon gave the Japanese a foothold in a part of Korea that had been relatively untouched during the first invasion. To consolidate their new gains the *wajo* of Suncheon, Sacheon, Goseong and Namhae, together with a replacement *wajo* on Geoje Island and a new castle at Masan, enhanced Japan's coastal defences west of Ungcheon. Two other *wajo* were built at Yangsan and Hopo to extend the defences up the Nakdong River, while Ulsan, to the north of Seosaengpo, literally became the end of the line. Over the next 18 months the *wajo* line experienced the full range of furious military activity from construction or rebuilding to siege and eventual abandonment.

Structural and architectural features of the *wajo*

Wherever they were built, and regardless of what existing Korean structures they were replacing, the *wajo* represented the transfer of Japanese castle styles into the continental environment. By the time of the Korean invasion the basic features of Japanese castle design had become well established, and had been used so often in Japan itself that when a new site for a castle was chosen the requirements for its construction could be assessed very rapidly. This was very important in the Korean context where the danger of attack was imminent.

In Japan there was only a very limited tradition of fortifying towns by building walls round them. Contemporary Kyoto was defended by earthworks and palisades, but had nothing resembling a 'city wall'. Instead the process of urbanization tended to happen in reverse. A successful fortified structure, chosen for strategic reasons, offered security and economic promise, so towns tended to develop around the castles as a defended community. The growth of the *jinaimachi* or temple towns associated with the self-governing communities of the True Pure Land sect of Buddhism and defended by their Ikko-ikki armies provides the best example.

A similar development of castle towns would eventually occur around some of the *wajo* sites in Korea, but the initial considerations behind building them were purely military. The process began with the selection and rapid survey of a mountain or large hill, but instead of then building snake-like stone walls in the Korean style, the main tool used in Japanese castle construction was the spade. By digging out soil and piling it up elsewhere the mountain was almost literally carved up like a gigantic sculpture to produce a system of interlocking baileys on different levels. The excavated soil and stones would be used to create extra lines outside the central castle area that followed the overall pattern of walls and ditches, or to build up carved sections and give even greater height. Many weird and wonderful combinations were created to hinder and trap and attacker. One favourite was the 'tiger's mouth', a defended gateway involving a 90-degree turn. Surviving examples in Korea are at Seosaengpo and Ungcheon.



The *tora no guchi* (tiger's mouth) gateway that passes through one of the inner walls of Ungcheon. This lies almost at the top of the main hill on which Ungcheon was built.



Gupo: building a castle for river defence



The fine detail of castle construction is provided by this exhibit at Odawara Castle. Note how the supporting beams for the protective roof of the walls have lengths of bamboo tied around them using rope. Plaster would be applied on top of this secure foundation.

These artificial plateaus, either carved out or built up, were then clad with a stone skin that followed a precise geometric curve. Massive stone blocks at the bottom anchored the huge bulk in place. These provided the maximum resistance against downward pressure from anything built on top of them or from pressure from within caused by heavy rain or even earthquakes. The areas of a Japanese castle that were carved out of a hillside were of course the strongest of all. Mining and the prising out of stones by an attacker could cause collapse of a built-up section, but the massive stone bases were amazingly strong. The base of Hiroshima Castle even withstood the atomic bomb in 1945.

Along the upper edges of the bases ran the characteristic walls that were uniquely Japanese. Instead of building up a stone parapet with merlons the Japanese would construct a long solid wall pierced with loopholes. The walls had an interlaced wooden core secured by ropes and pegs on top of which were spread layers of rough plaster in a manner akin to 'wattle and daub'. The outer surfaces would receive a coating of smooth plaster and were often whitewashed. A narrow pitched roof of tiles ran along the top edge to protect against rain and to hinder attackers.

The final element in creating a castle was to build gatehouses, corner towers and some form of keep on top of these bases. These were never built from stone in the western style, and the only use of stone to construct them would be in the base, just like a miniature version of the main castle bases. Instead there would be an extensive use made of wood, plaster and tile, with the walls often being made from the same mixture as the parapets. The clay made them remarkably fireproof, although this advantage was negated by the extensive use of timber within for staircases, roof beams and floors.

These well-established techniques, in particular the use of huge sloping stone bases, produced a style of fortress instantly recognizable as a 'Japanese castle'. It was so different from Korean and Chinese models that Yu Seongnyong refers to the unfamiliar appearance of the *wajo* twice in *Chingbirok* (*The Book of Corrections*), his account of why Korea failed:

OPPOSITE **Gupo: building a castle for river defence**

The castle of Gupo was built to support the larger fortress of Gimhae Jukdo further downstream on the Nakdong River. It provided defence for the Busan area from the north. This plate shows the site of Gupo being prepared in traditional Japanese style whereby the existing hillside was literally carved away and clad in stone. No superstructure has as yet been added, but the site is a hive of activity with labour being provided by Korean captives and press-ganged Japanese peasants. Under normal conditions in Japan the whole site would be cleared before the stone is added, but these are not normal conditions, and every day counts.



The wall of Fukuyama Castle, showing the use of stone cladding round a sculpted earthen core that was typical of Japanese castles. The identical use in Korea of white plastered walls pierced with arrow and gun ports is confirmed from the literature.

> The enemy built clay walls with holes on top of their fortress, which looked like a beehive. They fired their muskets through those holes as much as they could, and as a result, a number of Chinese soldiers were wounded.

And elsewhere:

> As I observed, the stronghold of the enemy was very quiet, and I could hardly see any activity. They did not build battlements on top of their fortress; instead, they made a long corridor all around [the fortress walls]. The guards of the enemy stayed inside that corridor and from there discharged their muskets whenever their opponents approached, pouring down bullets. Every day this kind of battle was repeated, and the bodies of Chinese soldiers and our own began to pile up under the walls of the fortress.

An escaped Korean prisoner of war observed the construction of the three *wajo* on Geoje Island. The information he fed back to Admiral Yi Sunsin confirms the techniques the Japanese used:

> Arriving at Yeongdeungpo on Geoje Island I saw about 200 houses newly built at three places on the archery grounds on the shore and under [Mount] Bukbong. They felled trees on Bukbong and levelled the ground to build a wide circular mud wall, inside which houses were being built ... In Jangmunpo and Songjinpo also they levelled the mountains and built mud-walls and houses there, with their large and medium boats moored under the rocky cliffs.

Being designed for coastal defence, a typical *wajo* consisted of an inner castle built on a hill overlooking a harbour, with most of its structures having been created by carving up the hill and cladding it in stone in classic Japanese fashion, although if there was extensive bedrock this would be built into the structure.

Nearly all the *wajo* had keeps and towers, and the larger *wajo* such as Seosaengpo and Suncheon would have looked no different from the castles the samurai had left behind in Japan. Most also had very extensive outer works, particularly where harbour defence was needed. To have built these with stone was too expensive in terms of time alone, so stone-based outer walls are only found in the most elaborate models such as Seosaengpo. Ditches and embankments built without stone were otherwise created. Long white plastered walls along the mounds would have been built wherever possible, but otherwise simple wooden fences and palisades would have had to suffice. These simpler walls would have had wooden observation towers built along the line, while many other wooden buildings for use as barracks, stables and storage would have been dotted about inside. In this the outer works of the *wajo* were little different from wartime extensions to Japanese castles back home. When the defences of Osaka were enhanced in preparation for the great siege of 1614–15 similar time constraints meant that the new outer walls were largely earthworks with ditches and wooden palisades. The typical *wajo*, therefore, was a Japanese castle that may have been as palatial in its inner quarters as a *daimyo*'s own fortress, but was defended on its outer perimeter by simpler structures reminiscent of castles of the early 16th century before stone was used extensively.

Because of their primary location at harbours the *wajo* most resembled Japanese castles that had a similar seaside location, although we do not find elaborate seawater moats in Korea. One feature found at some *wajo* was the existence of a 'mother' castle linked by a walkway of some kind to a smaller 'child' castle. This may have been done simply because of the proximity of two hills, but it also provided an extra form of defence for the harbour. Gijang provides an excellent surviving example.

All these techniques needed time and manpower. The Japanese were short of the former, but had the latter in great abundance: either from captured Korean civilians or Japanese peasants brought over as labourers and treated every bit as badly as their Korean counterparts. This was one reason why the *wajo* were built in a comparatively short space of time, but one other factor was the long experience that the Japanese architects and designers brought to the



The castle of Karatsu is built directly on the sea, and as such presents a remarkable appearance that would have been shared with the *wajo*. We see an impressive tower keep, typical of that built at the major *wajo* such as Seosaengpo, a defended anchorage and a jumble of houses and warehouses leading down to the harbour inlet and the river.



The 'proto-*wajo*' of Shimizu above the port of Izuhara on the island of Tsushima. Shimizu, which consists of three baileys on very high ground, was the last friendly base before Korea, and served as a prototype for the *wajo*.

task. In terms of concept and overall design, if not in actual structure, the *wajo* were therefore 'prefabricated buildings', and it was only through the use of the local lie of the land that any *wajo* was a 'one off'.

An interesting link between the design of native Japanese castles and the *wajo* that replicated them may be traced through the castles built in Kyushu and on the islands of Iki and Tsushima to support the invasion. Hizen-Nagoya Castle (as distinct from the other Nagoya Castle built a decade later in central Japan by the Tokugawa family) was the base from which the invasion was launched and the principal staging post from which reinforcements and supplies were channelled to Korea. It was built in a remarkably short space of time on a hill overlooking the port of Yobuko near Karatsu. The complete Hizen-Nagoya consisted of an enormous Japanese castle surrounded by the camps – effectively villages – that were used by the various *daimyo* who supplied men for the invasion. In the months leading up to the 1592 operation tens of thousands of men from all over Japan were housed there.

Less well known are the castles built on Iki and Tsushima for the same purpose of supporting the invasion. Both were like prototype *wajo*. The castle on Iki was on a mountain overlooking the harbour of Katsumoto at the island's northernmost point. There was probably some form of fortification already there when Hideyoshi ordered the building of a castle, which followed the usual Japanese pattern of a sculpted core clad in stone. The 'proto-*wajo*' of Shimizu on Tsushima guards the harbour of Izuhara. The So family, who had important connections with Korea (both legal and piratical), ruled Tsushima from their existing castle of Kaneishi, which was probably a low-lying fortress designed for harbour defence, backed up by a number of lookout posts high on the mountains behind Izuhara. Kaneishi had been sufficient for So Yoshitoshi's own purposes, but in 1592 Tsushima became the final jumping-off point for the Korea invasion, so more was needed. The lookout tower on the mountain immediately adjacent to the harbour was replaced by a three-bailey, stone-clad castle, which was given the name of Shimizu. It would have been connected to newly strengthened harbour defences. In this it anticipated the pattern of the rapid utilization of strategic high ground for coastal defence that would become the norm in Korea.

The *wajo* as a defensive system

Once established as a defensive toehold in 1593, the strategic role of the *wajo* was fivefold:

1. To provide communication with Japan to safeguard the inflow of reinforcements and supplies.
2. To deny harbours and moorings to the Korean Navy.
3. To provide a limited policing role during the occupation of Korea.
4. During the second invasion the *wajo* provided the means for a rapid advance once the armies had landed.
5. In their final role the *wajo* reverted to their initial function: that of providing a refuge against Chinese attacks, and then some security for the evacuation.

Safe harbours and secure moorings

Besides any communications role, the sheer existence of the *wajo* denied territory to the enemy on rivers, islands and coasts, and even though that territory was very small in area it was strategically very important to Korea, whose greatest strength was its navy. The Japanese had learned the hard way that if Admiral Yi caught them in open sea, as he did in the decisive battle of Hansando in 1592, then they would be annihilated. Several of Yi's earlier victories involved his turtle ships luring the Japanese fleet out into open water and attacking them. From the Japanese point of view a turning point in the struggle was the use of coastal defences during Yi's attack on Busan Harbour in September 1592. This time the Japanese did not sail out in pursuit, but counterattacked from the fortifications they had created out of the castles they had captured during the first landing. Yi failed to make any impression on the defences.

In spite of all the individual firepower possessed by its ships, the Korean Navy was limited in what it could do because of its need for night-time moorings. Once they realized this, the Japanese generals concluded that if they secured the coast of Gyeongsang Province with their *wajo* then Yi would not be able to base himself near enough to the major communication routes with Japan to threaten the Japanese ships. The raids on Ungcheon provided a good illustration of the Korean dilemma, because in spite of several attacks from the sea Yi was unable to control this vital harbour, and therefore did not dare advance into the waters to the east of Ungcheon, let alone launch another attack on Busan. Had he been able to destroy Busan, the partial Japanese evacuation of 1593 would have been as complete and as final as the one of 1598. Instead Busan continued to act as the main Japanese base in Korea with little fear of disruption.

BOTTOM LEFT The view from the magnificent ruins of Seosaengpo, looking towards the sea. Seosaengpo was the most important Japanese castle on the east coast of Korea. Fragments of the stone wall of the inner bailey appear in the foreground.

BOTTOM RIGHT The site of the *wajo* of Suncheon looking from the sea, a view made possible by the recent land reclamation project. The promontory on which Suncheon was built is very noticeable from this angle.







There was no time to erect elaborate defences for the outer works of the *wajo*, so simpler constructions reminiscent of earlier Japanese castles would have sufficed. This photograph shows the plain but effective rough plastered walls of Sakasai Castle.

Policing and defence

During the occupation a policing role developed along with the denial of harbours, but when the Japanese invaded again in 1597 they found that they had even less to worry about from the Korean Navy. Because of political intrigue at court, Yi had been temporarily suspended from his post. The inept Weon Gyun took his role as Korea's naval commander. When the second invasion happened the Korean fleet wandered round the seas off Korea's southern coast doing very little, and then Weon Gyun lost his life and much of the Korean Navy in a battle in the straits to the north of Geoje Island. Meanwhile the Japanese used the *wajo* as splendid 'jumping-off points'.

By the time Admiral Yi was reinstated the *wajo* line had been extended to provide further bases from which Japanese attacks could be directed. But the situation soon changed, and any 'offensive' role envisaged for the new *wajo* was flung suddenly into reverse. Their garrisons now had to face the prospect of attacks from Chinese armies on a much more massive scale than the operations that had caused the evacuation in 1593, and the Ming Army was now supported by a revitalized Korean Navy. The *wajo* therefore had to be able to withstand attack from the land as well from the sea, so their defensive role became paramount, until, at the very end of the war, they served only as last-ditch structures from which the Japanese troops could be safely taken home.

Within this overall strategic role it is possible to further classify the 30 *wajo* by dividing them into four general categories according to their individual functions:

Japanese headquarters

After the evacuation of Seoul, Busan became the base for all Japanese operations in Korea. The four *wajo* round the harbour may be regarded as a unity, with links to Dongnae, the coastal forts and the Nakdong garrisons. The Busan 'complex' was the only part of the *wajo* system to fall into this category.

The defensive model

Here the emphasis was on providing a safe anchorage for Japanese ships. The accent was totally defensive, with strong walls around the *wajo*, extending to the harbour with no reduction in defensive capability. Seosaengpo, which dates from the first invasion, is the best example. Its walls reached right down to the rocky cliffs beside the harbour from a powerful castle defended on the landward side by a cliff.

The spearhead model

These were the *wajo* designed to provide safe anchorage but with a more pronounced accent on the offensive. From *wajo* such as these attacks could be launched with ease, but a base was available into which the raiding parties could withdraw. Suncheon is the best example.

Secondary communications and support

Certain of the smaller *wajo*, particularly those not built on coats or estuaries, were designed to provide support to a major fortress or to act as communication links. Sindap and Masa, which supported Gimhae Jukdo; and Jama, which supported Ungcheon, are good examples. Most of these *wajo* were arranged in groups that could provide mutual support. The Nakdong River line and the Ungcheon/Geoje/Gadeok group are good examples of such a relationship.



The outer walls of the *wajo* included numerous simple openwork lookout towers, such as this reconstructed example at the Hojo's Sakasai Castle.

Commanders and garrisons

One vital factor in defending a *wajo* was the size and quality of its garrison, and throughout the war we find the names of Japan's most experienced generals in command of *wajo*. They would be in charge of troops drawn from their own domains, whose flags bore that commander's *mon* (family crest). No commands stayed the same for the whole of the six years. Nor, for that matter, did the number of the *wajo* or their locations. As circumstances changed so did the number of *wajo* in the line. Some were abandoned, others newly built.

By the end of June 1593, 17 *wajo* had been created. This was quite a large number, but the main reason for spreading the occupying forces between 17 forts was to allow for more successful foraging. It was a lesson that had been learned the hard way, because when the Japanese retreated from Seoul their supplies had quickly run out. The initial disposition of the command for these *wajo* was as follows:

Seosaengpo	Kato Kiyomasa
Imrangpo	Mori Yoshinari, Shimazu Tadatoyo, Ito Yubei, Takahashi Mototane, Akizuki Tanenaga
Gijang	Kuroda Nagamasa
Dongnae	Kikkawa Hiroie
Busan Group	Mori Terumoto
Gimhae Jukdo	Nabeshima Naoshige
Gadeok Island Group	Kobayakawa Takakage, Tachibana Muneshige and others
Angolpo	Wakizaka Yasuharu, Kuki Yoshitaka, Kato Yoshiaki and others
Ungcheon	Konishi Yukinaga
Myeongdong	Matsuura Shigenobu
Jama	So Yoshitomo
Yeongdeungpo	Shimazu Yoshihiro
Jangmunpo	Fukushima Masanori, Toda Katsukata, Chosokabe Motochika
Jisepo	Hachisuka Iemasa, Ikoma Chikamasa



Suncheon: the spearhead style



The *wajo* of Gijang, in common with several other *wajo*, consisted of two castles, a main and a subsidiary fortress, on adjacent hills. Here we see the 'child castle' of Gijang looking from the 'mother castle'.

In August 1593 a review was carried out of the size of garrisons to be stationed at each *wajo*, and it was decided to place 5,000 men in the larger castles and between 2,000 and 3,000 men in the smaller ones, making a grand total for the occupying forces of about 43,000 men, all of whom were based inside *wajo*.

A rotation system was in operation for the garrisons, as revealed in September 1593 by an escaped Korean prisoner of war who gave Admiral Yi a concise account of the garrison plan of the *wajo* and the rotation mechanism. 'Half of their numbers defend their fortified walls and half returned home' he said. 'Those who defend the walls will also go home in the third moon of next year on arrival of their reliefs.' In a Memorial to Court dated 8 January 1594 Admiral Yi reported to the king on his own up-to-date observations of the *wajo* situation:

> The retreating Japanese robbers still occupy the southern coastal area without the least sign of evacuation. Judging from their movements no one can tell their unfathomable strategic plans. The increasing Japanese robbers on Geoje Island dig more dens, with their vessels moored deep in the ports as their boats busily ply up and down the sea entrances, threatening to come out with surprise attacks at any moment.

A month later Yi received a report which recorded active building work taking place on Geoje Island, by 'hundreds of Japanese taking positions in barracks outside Jisepo and Okpo, pitching tents in fours and fives in never ending lines at strategic points in the fields'. The Japanese were also seen 'moving about in scattered companies in the daytime and signalling to each other with torches at night'. A separate report from Weon Gyun supported the observations that the barracks construction was in full swing 'amid the booming of guns'.

These arrangements continued throughout the occupation, but towards the end of the period many Japanese troops were withdrawn from Korea to assure the Ming peace negotiators that Japan was in good faith about reaching a negotiated settlement. The garrison strengths then shrunk considerably, but peaceful intentions were quickly forgotten in the months immediately preceding the second invasion, when the number of troops in Korea was increased to 20,390 to facilitate a rapid advance. Kobayakawa Hideaki, the adopted son of Kobayakawa Takakage, who had died in 1596, now commanded the main garrison of 10,390 men in Busan. Hideaki was then only 15 years old and owed his early promotion to the fact that he was the nephew of Hideyoshi. The other 10,000 left 'holding the fort' in preparation for a new advance were:

OPPOSITE **Suncheon: the spearhead style**

The castle of Suncheon is the best example of the so-called 'spearhead model' that was intended to provide a base for further penetration into Korea rather than just defensive purposes. For this reason it is a very extensive and confident building, and resembles a fully developed castle in Japan. The insert shows the principle behind the spearhead model.

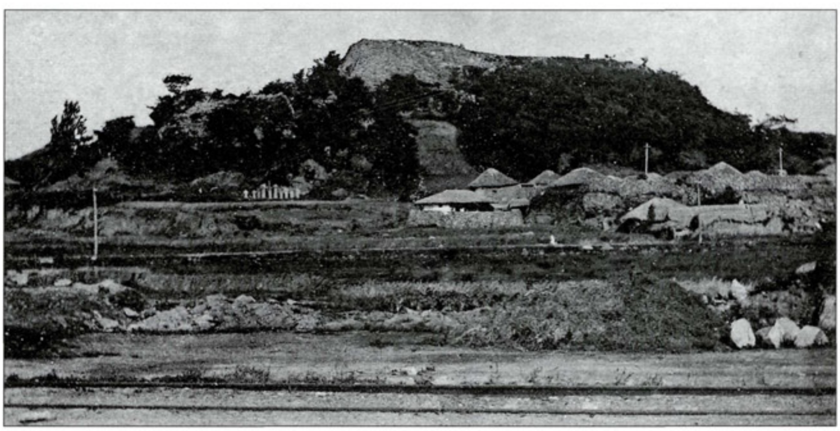
Angolpo	Tachibana Munetora	5,000
Gadeok Island	Takahashi Saburo	1,000
Seosaengpo	Asano Chokei	3,000
Gimhae Jukdo	Kobayakawa Hidekane	1,000

These *wajo* provided easy landings in Korea for the extra 121,100 men who invaded Korea for the second time in March 1597. Kobayakawa Hideaki was assisted by the 18-year-old Mori Hidemoto, who replaced his cousin Terumoto. The veteran Kato Kiyomasa came ashore with his troops at Gimhae Jukdo. Konishi Yukinaga landed at Busan and headed west to the *wajo* of Angolpo, which was to be the main naval base during the second invasion.

The reversal to Japanese fortunes at the hands of Admiral Yi and a new Ming invasion came surprisingly soon after the landings, and led to an urgent reappraisal of the *wajo* line. Once again the line was changed to a new system consisting of only 14 fortresses. They were, however, spread out further than ever, and stretched as far west as Suncheon to encompass Namhae, Sacheon, Goseong, Waeseongdong, Masan, Gimhae Jukdo, Busan, Yangsan and Seosaengpo. The final *wajo*, that of Ulsan, was begun at this time. Waeseongdong was a new *wajo* on Geoje Island. It was built overlooking the strategic Gyonnaerang Strait and replaced the other three *wajo* on Geoje.

Busan and its support castles initially held 40,000 men under Mori Hidemoto and Ukita Hideie. There was little activity for a few months after the epic winter siege of Ulsan, so on 26 June 1598 Hideyoshi recalled roughly half of his troops to Japan, including those men led by Ukita Hideie, Mori Hidemoto and Hachisuka Iemasa. Kobayakawa Hideaki was also recalled, leaving the *wajo* line in its final form as:

Ulsan	Kato Kiyomasa	10,000
Seosaengpo	Kuroda Nagamasa	5,000
Busan	Mori Yoshinari	5,000
Gimhae Jukdo and Masan	Nabeshima Naoshige and Katsushige	12,000
Waeseongdong	Yanagawa Tsunanobu	1,000
Goseong	Tachibana Muneshige	7,000
Sacheon	Shimazu Yoshihiro	10,000
Namhae	So Yoshitomo	1,000
Suncheon	Konishi Yukinaga	13,700
	Total	64,700



An old photograph of Jaseongdae *wajo*, the 'child castle' of Busan.

The *wajo*'s defensive armaments

Hand-held firearms in the form of matchlock arquebuses were the main means of defence of the *wajo*, just as they had been the main means of attack on the Korean fortresses in 1592. In contrast to the popular myth that the samurai regarded gunpowder weapons as dishonourable, the pragmatic generals used volleys of thousands of bullets to clear the walls of a castle to allow the sword-wielding samurai to scale the parapets and engage in hand-to-hand combat. The latter could not have been undertaken without the former, and a letter home from Korea sent by Shimazu Yoshihiro in November 1592 makes the position abundantly clear. 'Please arrange to send us guns and ammunition', he wrote, 'there is absolutely no use for spears.'

Siege cannon, either on a large European scale or on a smaller Chinese scale, were both unknown and unnecessary in the Japanese context. The stone bases that constituted Japanese castles were not the sort of walls that cannon could batter down, so Hideyoshi's army took nothing resembling a siege train with it, and it was therefore fortunate for the Japanese that the easily scalable walls were not able to withstand a Japanese assault with arquebuses. Strangely enough, cannon did not defend the Korean castles, even though heavy cannon were mounted on Korean ships, whose broadsides created havoc on the heavily laden Japanese transports. Not surprisingly, Yi fired on the walls of the *wajo* from his ships, but was then surprised to find his fire being returned. What the Japanese had done was to mount captured Korean cannon on the *wajo*. From this time on cannon played a role in *wajo* defence, and there exists a fascinating diagram for Ulsan that sets out the angles and range of fire that could be brought to bear both from Ulsan and against it.

Records exist of the breakdown of weaponry in the two grades of *wajo* at the start of the occupation, as shown in the following table:

	Large *wajo* (Gadeok)	Small *wajo* (Yeongdungpo)
Garrison size	5,000	2,000
Firearms, (including)	200	100
Large calibre	1	1
50 *monme*	10	10
30 *monme*	10	5
20 *monme*	10	5
13 *monme*	4	2
6 *monme*	10	10
2.5 *monme*	150	72
Saltpetre	450 *kin*	400 *kin*
Gunpowder	800 *kin*	400 *kin*
Bullets	4,500	4,000
Lead	450 *kin*	400 *kin*
Sulphur	45 *kin*	40 *kin*
Bows	300	100
Arrows	6,000	2,000
Swords	450	400
Suits of Armour	17	15
Helmets	10	7
Spears	200	100

One *monme* is 3.75g while 1 *kin* is 160 *monme*, or 0.6kg.

Seosaengpo, the greatest of the early *wajo*, has this long wall that enclosed its inner bailey. It is the largest surviving fragment of any *wajo*.




Seosaengpo: the defensive style



The perfectly preserved base of the keep of Suncheon, from which a tree now grows in place of the graceful white superstructure that would have dominated the site.

Apart from firearms and bows, the main means of defence of a *wajo* was through the use of cold steel, either in the form of the famous samurai sword, the long spear (*yari*), or the curved-bladed spear called a *naginata*. Ingenious use was also made of broken or discarded swords, including the Chinese blades that were considered so inferior, to create a sharp barrier as part of the defences. On his visit to Pyongyang Yu Seongnyong noted that: 'The spears and swords that the Japanese had set up on the battlements, pointed at the Chinese soldiers, looked like the needles of a porcupine.' We encounter this means of augmenting defences again at Ulsan. Yoshimi Hiroyuki, aged 15 in one account and 18 in another, who 'excelled in the way of bow and arrow', ordered his *ashigaru* to draw the enemy on but not to waste their arrows, and led an impetuous charge that covered the retreat:

> After a short while Yoshimi returned to the safety of the castle, and seeing that the gateway of the section of the defence works for which he was responsible was looking in a poor state, he ordered his retainers to construct a low wall by using the various large and small swords that had been collected, thus producing a rampart of spikes.

OPPOSITE **Seosaengpo: the defensive style**

This plate depicts Seosaengpo, the mightiest *wajo* of all. Unlike Suncheon, Seosaengpo was built primarily with defensive purposes in mind, as shown in the first insert. It is nonetheless a magnificent castle, with long walls that run down the hill to cover the harbour. The second insert shows the interior of the castle being built.

The *wajo* from end to end

The following gazetteer of all the *wajo* sites is based upon the excavation reports carried out by the Wajo Kenkyu Kai and other organizations, together with my own fieldwork observations. The name of the *wajo* as it appears in contemporary Japanese chronicles, where known, is in brackets after the *wajo* name. Further details may be found in the captions to the illustrations.

The Busan Harbour defences

Busan was the nerve centre of the support system for the invasion of Korea from the moment of its capture, and the headquarters for the entire operation once Seoul was abandoned in 1593.

Busan *wajo* (Fusankai)

Sadly, less survives of Busan *wajo* than of any other major Japanese fortress, which is largely due to the development of South Korea's most important



A map from 1919 showing the relationship between the four *wajo* of Busan Harbour. In the north we have the 'mother and child' castles of Busan and Jaseongdae. Bakmungu lies at the tip of the mainland, while the eastern coast of Yeong Island is protected by Dongsamdong.

harbour city. As most of the area is now built over, excavation has been very limited, so any conclusions about the appearance of the historic castle are based on old maps and the fragments of the walls that still survive in what is now a public park. Busan *wajo* consisted of three baileys, with a keep at the western corner of the inner bailey. A long stone wall ran down the hill towards the sea at the southern end. It is probable that Busan *wajo* was built on the site of a Korean *sanseong*, which may have been physically connected to the city walls beside the harbour itself.

Jaseongdae

As shown in the accompanying map from 1919, to the east of Busan *wajo* lay another hill right at the water's edge, and this was to provide the location for Busan's secondary *wajo* now known as Jaseongdae. The name means 'the child castle' as distinct from the 'mother castle' of Busan *wajo*. Jaseongdae was created out of the fortress captured by So Yoshitoshi during the first assault. At that time its walls were lapped by the sea, and formed a continuation of the *eupseong* that defended Busan. The Japanese demolished the Korean fortress and the *wajo* was erected in its place. Again we see three baileys, but on a much smaller scale that the 'mother castle'. Almost the whole of the elevated area where the castle stood remains intact, although it is covered with trees and only small sections of the *wajo* walls remain. The flat upper surface of the inner bailey is still there. Jaseongdae originally had four gates, two of which have been restored in Korean style, which would have been the appearance they had when the Japanese attacked. These gates may well have been retained when the Korean castle was converted into a *wajo*.

Bakmungu

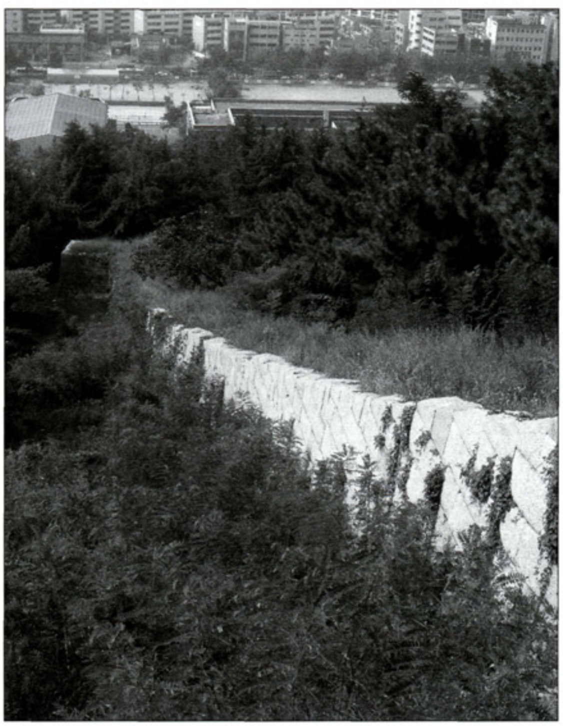
The 'mother' and 'child' castles of Busan protected the inner harbour, but to reach that area any attack from the sea would have had to pass Yeong Island, which is dominated by Mount Bongnae (395m). The small *wajo* of Bakmungu was built on the mainland directly across the strait from Yeong Island at its narrowest point. It has since completely disappeared.

Dongsamdong

Dongsamdong, otherwise known as Yeongdo from the island on which it lay, occupied a hill on the water's edge on the eastern shore of Yeong Island. Together with Bakmungu all shipping entering Busan Harbour could be monitored. There is almost nothing left of the buildings, but the promontory on which it was built has so far escaped being built upon.

Dongnae (Tokuneki)

Dongnae was an important *sanseong* on the road north out of Busan, which was captured by the Japanese soon after the fall of Busan. The mountains on which Dongnae was built command the area, and its walls were strengthened against Japanese pirate attack in 1381. It is not surprising that this too was taken over by the Japanese and converted into a *wajo*. When the Japanese left the site was re-used by the Korean Army and nearly all the Japanese structures were demolished in favour of a new fortress in the Korean style. All that remains of any Japanese fortifications on Dongnae is a stretch of the long wall running down the hill, at the foot of which is the shrine built in memory of the Korean defenders of Dongnae in 1592.



The long wall of Dongnae is all that remains of the *wajo* of Dongnae, located on a strategic hill that has served as a fortified site for centuries.



The rebuilt Korean-style gate of Jaseongdae. The original may have been retained when the site was in use as a *wajo*.

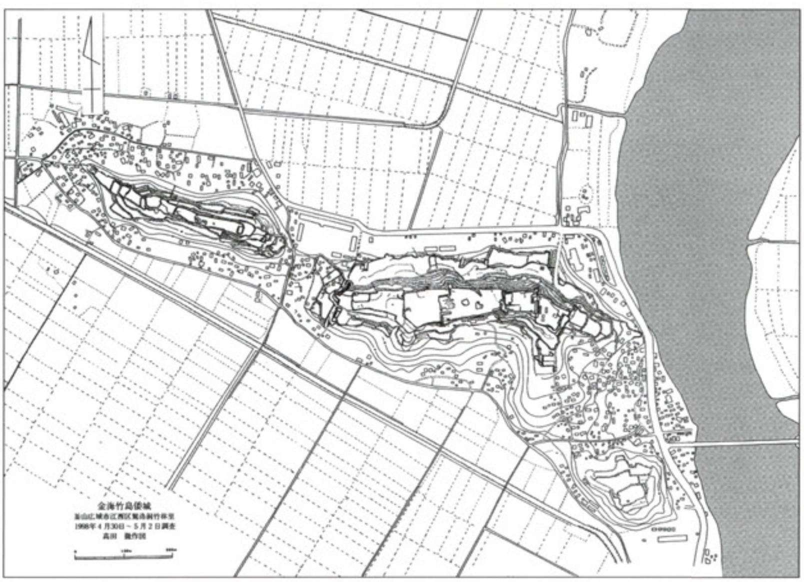
Map of the site of Gimhae Jukdo showing the two sections of the castle. It may well be the case that the outer castle was on an island in the Nakdong River.

The *wajo* on the Nakdong River

The Nakdong River provides a western moat for the Busan area, and indeed was used in that precise capacity by UN forces during the Korean War as part of the famous 'Pusan Perimeter'.

Gimhae Jukdo (Kinmui)

The *wajo* of Gimhae Jukdo was built on the western bank of the Nakdong River near to the Korean *eupseong* of Gimhae that was captured by Kuroda Nagamasa during the first invasion. Its site, of which only a small section of wall survives, lies quite close to Busan's Gimhae Airport and has been excavated in recent years. Land reclamation has obscured its likely original setting, which probably saw half the *wajo* on an island (Jukdo) and the other on the riverbank. The two were probably connected by a bridge, and would have controlled river traffic very effectively. Following the 1597 invasion Gimhae Jukdo passed under the jurisdiction of Nabeshima Naoshige and had a garrison of 12,000 men.



Sindap (Tokuhashi)

Gimhae Jukdo was supported from a little way inland by the tiny communications fort of Sindap, probably built on the site of a Korean *sanseong*.

Masa

Upstream from Gimhae Jukdo a branch of the Nakdong River called the West Nakdong River flows west and then south beside the modern city of Gimhae. On its southern bank lies the site of a small *wajo* called Masa. Excavations in 1994 revealed a simple layout whereby two adjacent hills were levelled to make two baileys with a slope between them.

Gupo (Katokai)

Gupo, built to support the much larger Gimhae Jukdo, is one of the most accessible and rewarding *wajo* sites to visit. It occupies a dramatic position on the eastern bank of the Nakdong upstream from Gimhae Jukdo, the site of which can be seen from Gupo's well-preserved inner bailey. Excavations have revealed an elaborate use of the technique of hill shaping to produce a complex terraced structure. Nine separate levels in all have been identified. Three make up the inner, middle and outer baileys of the castle with a fourth on the northern side. A fifth lay below the castle gate to the south, while three more overlooked the river. A separate terrace projected into the river to guard the harbour, allowing boats to moor directly under the castle walls.

Hopo

Tiny Hopo lies further upstream. A few fragments of wall are all that remain.

Yangsan (Ryakkusan)

Yangsan is the final *wajo* on the Nakdong River line, and dates from 1597. It lies within sight of Hopo on a hill across a minor tributary. The castle had an unusual shape, being long and thin, having had a succession of baileys cut out of the very top of the mountain. A Korean fortress here was abandoned by its defenders in 1592 when the Japanese Army opened fire.

The long walls of Seosaengpo, as shown on an old Japanese illustration. Many of these walls still stand. The picture shows how Seosaengpo was built on a naturally strong position that sloped down towards the harbour, shown at the bottom.



The east coast

Gijang (Kuchan)

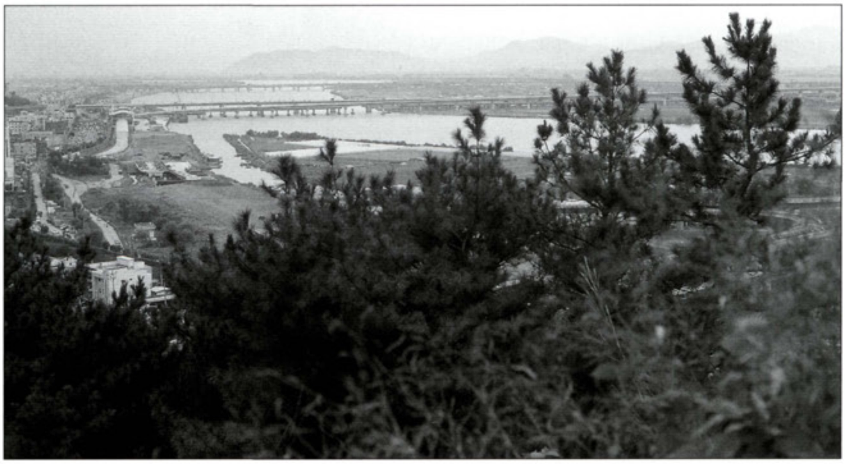
Kuroda Nagamasa was first associated with Gijang, and was there during the occupation, after which he moved to Yangsan. Otherwise known in Korea as Jukseongri, Gijang was one of the most important *wajo* during the first invasion. The ruins are well preserved and show better than any other *wajo* the relationship between a castle and the harbour it guarded, because the harbour area is still remarkably undeveloped and there has been little land reclamation. Gijang also illustrates the model of a 'mother' and 'child' castle, each of which consists of a multi-bailey set of excavated terraces.

Imrangpo (Seiguhan or Seigan)

Very little remains of this east coast fortress that together with Gijang provided a link between Busan and Seosaengpo. It appears to have consisted of two sites on adjacent hilltops linked by a zigzag footpath.

Seosaengpo (Sekkai)

Until the building of Ulsan late in 1597 mighty Seosaengpo lay at the eastern extremity of the *wajo* line. This very important fortress provides a classic example of the 'defensive' model of *wajo*. Built on a steep hill set back from the sea, Seosaengpo was defended on its eastern side by cliffs whose natural features were augmented with well-constructed stone-clad walls. Tiger's-head gateways



A distant view of Gimhae Jukdo looking down the line of the Nakdong River from the top of the hill on which Gupo *wajo* was built.

and secondary walls provided a number of twists and turns for an attacker, but even to reach the stage of attacking the inner castle he would have had to break through the two strong and almost parallel walls that ran down to enclose the harbour. At the water's edge these walls met a further castle mound that covered the entrance and exit of ships beside a number of jagged rocks that still protrude from the ground, even though the sea is now a couple of miles away. Seosaengpo was under the command of Kato Kiyomasa, and it was from Seosaengpo that Kiyomasa sailed to the relief of Ulsan. The destruction of Seosaengpo remained an important objective of the allied forces throughout the war, but it was so strong that no attack was launched on Seosaengpo until the very end of the war.

Ulsan (Urusan)

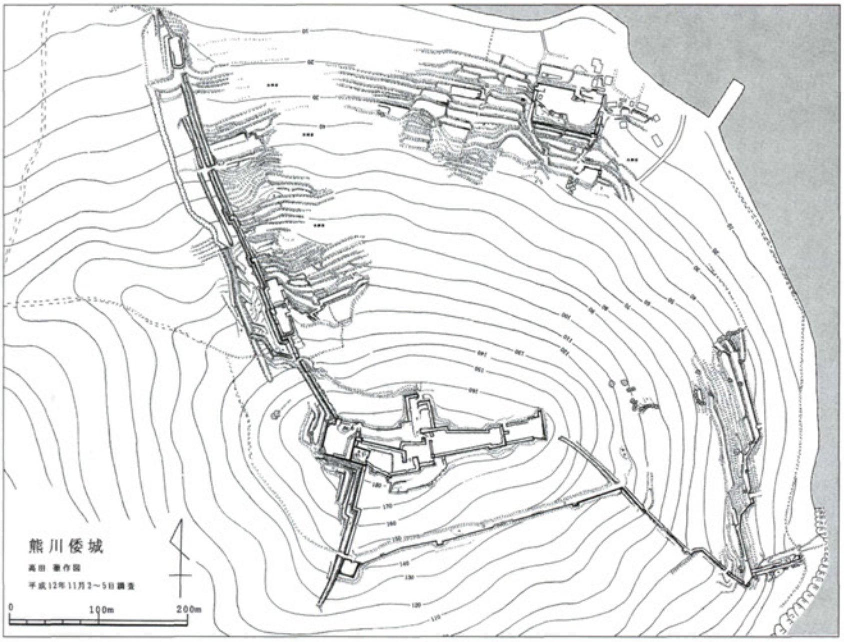
Ulsan was the last *wajo* to be built, and came under attack before it was finished in an epic siege in January and February 1598 that is described later. The hill on which the inner bailey was built is still preserved, and in 1597 lay between two streams that fed the river estuary. Ulsan is illustrated on a remarkable painted screen made originally for the Nabeshima family. It shows the inner castle consisting of four areas on the same level, subdivided by walls and gates, which tallies with archaeological investigation in all but the actual shape. There are five corner towers but no keep. The towers are simple structures with a wooden frame and tiled roofs. The long parapet walls are pierced with square loopholes. Within the walls are simple wooden buildings, some of which are thatched. Use is also made of *maku* (field curtains) ornamented with Kato Kiyomasa's *mon* (family crest).

One weakness of Ulsan was the fact that it could be bombarded by the Chinese heavy artillery from a hill immediately to the north, although this does not appear to have been done very often during the siege, perhaps to avoid casualties to the human wave attacks that characterized the assault on Ulsan.

Ungcheon and the islands

Ungcheon (Komagai)

Ungcheon, which was supported by Myeongdong and Jama, was the most important *wajo* after Busan during the first invasion and the occupation. Although Ungcheon possessed an *eupseong*, remains of which still exist, the invaders rejected it in favour of the nearby hill that projects out into the sea with cliffs on its southern side. The northern side provided excellent protection for a natural harbour, which is still used by fishermen and pleasure craft. A long wall ran from the summit down the hillside to the harbour, where there were some fortifications to protect the 'castle town' that grew up around it. There were also some fortified buildings on the eastern side, again linked to the summit by a long wall, but the most important part of Ungcheon *wajo* lay along the ridge at the very top of the hill. Here was a magnificent Japanese castle defended by stone walls and tiger's-head gateways. Ungcheon is one of the best *wajo* to visit. The approach is up a mountain path that parallels the course of the northern wall as far as a saddle, from where a steep climb takes one up to the top.



A detailed map of the *wajo* of Ungcheon, showing the central area and the two dramatic long walls leading to the main harbour at the north and the sea at the east.

Myeongdong (Koyama)

Essentially a support castle on the other side of the headland to the west of Ungcheon, the few remains of Myeongdong are to be found on four hilltops overlooking the small harbour area.

Jama

This was also a support castle for Ungcheon and lies some distance inland beyond the Ungcheon *eupseong*. So little remains that until comparatively recently it was not thought to be a *wajo* site at all.

Angolpo (Ankaurai)

Three Japanese admirals are associated with Angolpo, where a fierce naval battle took place in 1592. The *wajo*, which was to act as an important Japanese naval base during the 1597 invasion, occupied an interesting position along the ridge of a narrow peninsula that enclosed the harbour to the north. Two lines of fortifications ran down to the harbour area to enclose it very securely. Much of the site it still intact, but a great deal of the western end of the peninsula has been cut away as part of the massive harbour-building programme currently under way.

Masan (Chawan)

Also called Changwon, Masan was one of the *wajo* created during 1597 to advance Japanese interests west of Ungcheon. It was the nearest to the Ungcheon area, and guarded the inlet of Jinhae Bay.

Gadeok (Katoku)

Gadeok Island lies between the large Geoje Island and the area of Busan Harbour, so was always of great strategic interest. The Gadeok *wajo* was one of the first to be built, and lay not on Gadeok itself but on a tiny island off its northern tip called Nulcha. Very little has survived of what was once a large castle.

Gadeok Seongbuk

Gadeok Seongbuk was a support castle built on Gadeok Island itself within sight of Gadeok *wajo*. Again it appears to be a very simple *wajo* built on one hill.



The siege of Ulsan, as depicted on a painted screen owned by Saga Prefectural Museum of History. Made originally for the Nabeshima family, it shows the inner castle, consisting of four areas on the same level, subdivided by walls and gates, which tallies with archaeological investigation in all but the actual shape. There are five corner towers but no keep. The towers are simple structures with a wooden frame and tiled roofs. The long parapet walls topped with tiles are well illustrated. They are pierced with square loopholes, and the artist has tried to show the unfinished state by indicating certain areas that have not been plastered, or perhaps from where the Chinese attackers have torn the coating. Within the walls are simple wooden buildings, some of which are thatched. Use is also made of *maku* (field curtains) ornamented with Kato Kiyomasa's *mon* (family crest). Dead bodies lie everywhere inside and out, and within one of the courtyards the defenders are eating a dead horse. Thousands of Chinese soldiers are flinging themselves at the walls.

Yeongdeungpo

Geoje Island, which became notorious during the Korean War for its POW camp, is the largest island in the waterway adjacent to the Korean coast. It is very irregularly shaped, and will soon be physically joined to Busan by a suspension bridge via Gadeok Island. Yeongdeungpo was the first *wajo* to be established on Geoje and was located at the island's most northerly point, where it commanded a harbour from a prominent hill. The castle was long, thin and L-shaped and overlooked the site of a Korean fortress that was considered insufficient for Japanese needs. The castles on Geoje Island acquired considerable significance during the first invasion following the naval battles of Hansando and Angolpo that happened nearby, but were abandoned towards the end of the occupation.

Jangmunpo

Jangmunpo and Jisepo commanded a position in the north-west of Geoje Island. Each was built on a promontory that enclosed a harbour within a sheltered sea area protected to the west by Chilcheon Island. Jangmunpo to the south was the larger of the two. It consisted of a narrow L-shaped castle that



A view of Yeong Island from Busan Tower, showing the site of Bakmungu on the mainland. Bakmungu was built on the small flat area of derelict land near the modern bridge.



The long 'hog's-back' hill in the far distance of this picture is the site of the *wajo* of Ungcheon. The extant stone base of the keep may be identified.

followed the ridge with a separate castle below. Three walls ran down to the sea in a similar way to Ungcheon.

Jisepo

Also called Songjinpo, Jisepo lay to the north of Jangmunpo. It had a 'mother' and 'child' layout and was smaller overall that Jangmunpo.

Waeseongdong

Waeseongdong replaced the abandoned Geoje fortifications in 1597. It covered the strategic Gyonnaerang straits to the west that provided access to the seas around Hansando, the site of the epic battle of 1592. The site of Waeseongdong lies close to the modern Geoje Bridge that connects the island to the mainland at its western edge. Unlike the other *wajo* on Geoje Island, Waeseongdong utilized only one modest hill to the north of a river, and therefore had a simple and regular layout similar to Gadeok Seongbuk.

The western *wajo*

The *wajo* at the western end of the line initially owed their existence to the mood of optimism following the fall of Namweon in 1597. Although originally intended to act as bases for further conquest, the Chinese counterattack meant that they were to see most of the defensive action in the closing days of the war.

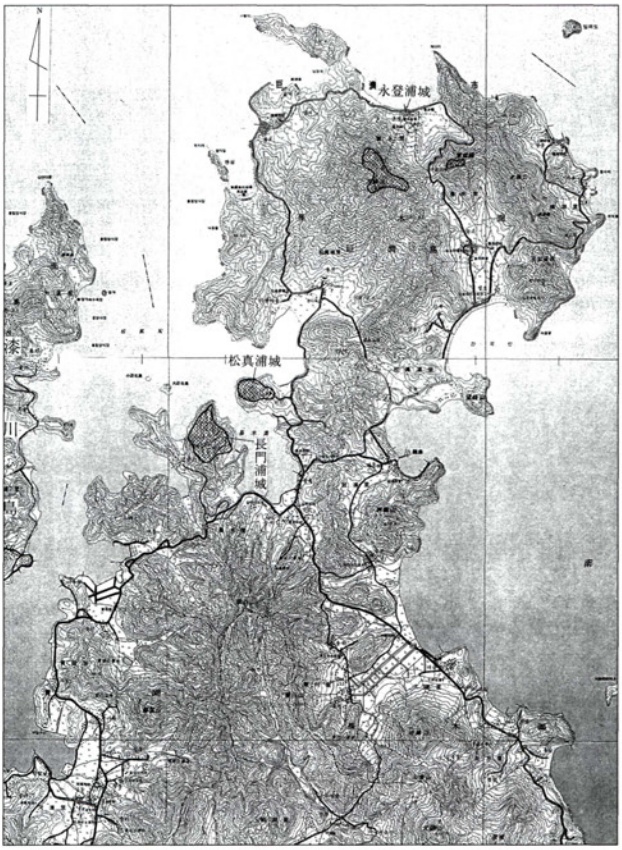
Goseong (Kosan or Koseo)

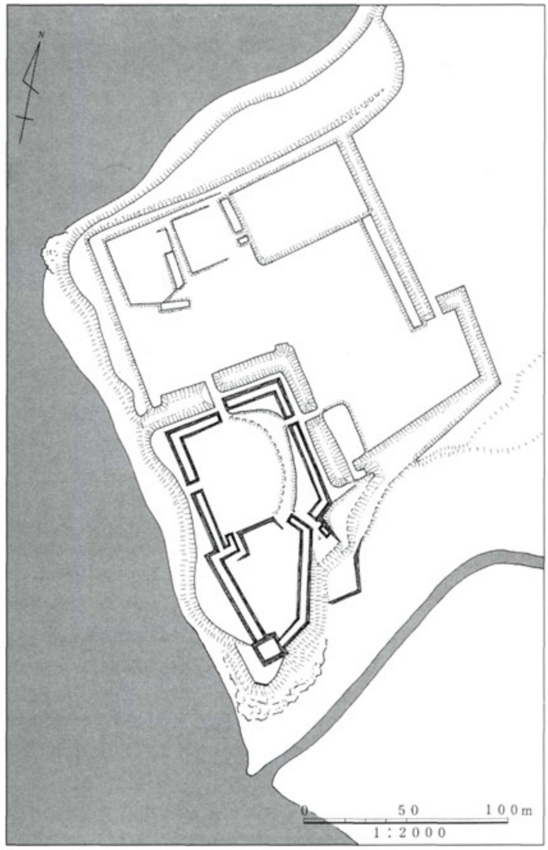
Goseong lies on the mainland near the gulf of Danghangpo, the site of one of Admiral Yi's celebrated victories. A few stone walls are all that remain.

Sacheon (Sosan or Soten)

At the very end of the war Shimazu Yoshihiro suffered a massive Chinese attack at Sacheon. The site had been in use throughout the campaign in one form or another, and is mentioned in reports of the naval battle fought there by Admiral Yi. This was the first occasion on which a turtle ship was used, and Yi's description also indicates that the Japanese were building one of their first fortified positions here as early as July 1592:

> Beyond the wharf at Sacheon along the coast stood a rocky crest above undulating ridges extending seven or eight *li*. On the hazy crest about four hundred Japanese were seen building a serpentine position with red and





TOP LEFT A map of the northern part of Geoje Island, showing the location of the three *wajo*. From north to south they are Yeongdeongpo, Jisepo (also called Songjinpo) and Jangmunpo.

TOP RIGHT A plan of the *wajo* of Waeseongdong, erected on Geoje Island to replace the three earlier castles. Note the offset lines of the stone walls, and the keep at the south-west corner.

> white flags planted confusedly in order to bewilder the eyes of the onlookers. There was a tent [probably open field curtains] pitched on the summit, where the Japanese hurried to and fro as if listening to instructions from their commanding officer.

The final version of Sacheon *wajo* that withstood the siege of 1598 was by all accounts a magnificent structure in a very strong position on cliffs overlooking the sea. Its inner baileys with separate domestic buildings and a fine keep rivalled Suncheon and Seosaengpo, and there were extensive outer works.

Namhae (Namuhai)

Isolated on an island, Namhae provided the last refuge for Japanese troops retreating to Busan by sea after the final battle at Noryang. Its site, a modest hill on the eastern shore of Namhae Island, involved the now-familiar model of a castle on a promontory.

Suncheon

Suncheon held the western end of the line in Jeolla Province, and was therefore the only *wajo* not to be built in Gyeongsang Province. Its site is very well preserved and can be seen from miles away. The main castle sat on top of a rocky cliff that sloped gently down on the landward side. There was a keep, the base of which has survived intact. A Ming painting of the siege of Suncheon shows the castle with a moat across the headland, but this is not borne out by the archaeological evidence. As the classic example of the 'spearhead' *wajo*, Suncheon was designed to allow the Japanese to take the fight to the enemy while preserving the security of its two harbour areas. The outer walls were modest in size, but withstood the Ming siege engines in 1598.

The living site

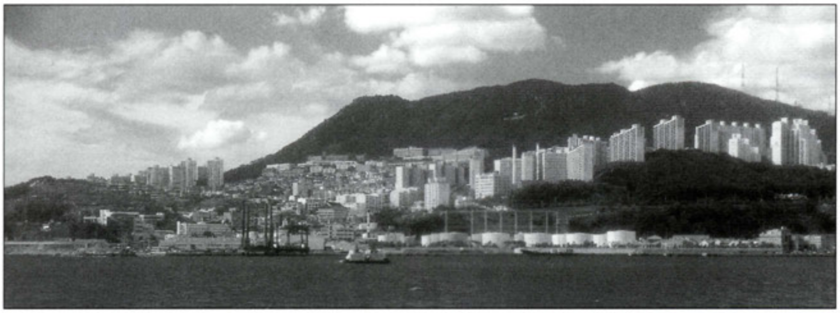
The realm of the beasts: building the *wajo*

The *wajo* owed their rapid creation to the labour of thousands of unwilling workmen who would have been forgotten by history had it not been for the sympathetic observations of their plight made by a monk called Keinen, who accompanied the second invasion in 1597 in the capacity of Buddhist chaplain to the minor *daimyo* Ota Kazuyoshi. Keinen kept a diary in which he recorded the nightmare experience of the building and defence of Ulsan. Using language drawn from Buddhist concepts, he likened the scene to the lowest of the realms of transmigration of souls. In their brutality men had entered the 'realm of the beasts', the lowest but one state that existed. As the cruelty grew Keinen despaired even more, and concluded that the lowest realm of all had been reached. 'Hell,' he wrote, 'could not be anywhere but here.' It was the constant noise of building work that first gave him cause for concern:

> From all around comes the sound of the hammers of the blacksmiths and the workmen, and the swish and scraping of the adze. With the dawn it grows more and more terrible, but if it means we will not be defeated I can put up with the banging I am being subjected to even in the middle of the night.

The constant labour was hard and unremitting, and was imposed particularly cruelly on the shoulders of the press-ganged peasants drafted from samurai estates in Japan, who were forced to work alongside Korean captives. 'To prevent carelessness heads are cut off,' he writes, 'but blame is not shared equally, and to the sorrow of the peasants it is their heads that they cut off and stick up at the crossroads.' In the intense pressure to have the walls of Ulsan finished before the Chinese Army arrived, these labourers were clearly regarded as expendable, and were worked until they dropped. One day Keinen looked across the fields white with snow and thought he saw packhorses, but instead it was the labourers trudging through the snow with their painfully heavy burdens.

The peasants whom the samurai were flogging were men who would be expected to till the lands of these overlords when they returned to Japan, but in the unreal atmosphere of the Korean campaign there was no thought for the future other than the immediate short-term goal of completing the *wajo*'s defences. 'With no distinction being made between day and night,' writes Keinen, 'men are made to exceed their personal limits. There are beatings for the slightest mistake in performing a task such as tying knots. In many cases I have witnessed, this is the last ever occasion on which the person gets into trouble.'



The green hill on the right of the picture once housed Dongsamdong *wajo* on Yeong Island, seen here from the sea within Busan harbour.

To add to the misery caused by overwork, the labourers also had to suffer attacks from the Chinese patrols that were beginning to appear in the vicinity. Keinen writes of a group of peasants left in the forest to trim the branches off the newly felled trees. A Chinese unit came upon them and beheaded them all. 'Brought here from thousands of miles away,' he writes, 'they are tortured for even one single moment of carelessness. I do not see these as actions which human beings could devise.' In a vivid metaphor, prompted by seeing the labourers staggering under the weight of the supplies unloaded from the ships, Keinen writes:

> Yet even amidst all this, the carrying of heavy loads piled up like a *horai* [the 'treasure mountain' of Chinese mythology] between the harbour and the rear lines is an exceptionally terrible thing. They drag them along to [shouts of] 'Come on!', but when they reach the wooden palisade these dumb oxen are of no use anymore, and are slaughtered, their hides are flayed, and they are eaten. 'Is this not the realm of beasts?' thought I.

Keinen, of course, does not mean us to take literally his words about the 'dumb oxen', which the peasants have become, being 'flayed and eaten', but the reality of the situation is almost as terrible. When food supplies became a problem, the peasants 'were not given their rations, but were driven away up into the mountains and abandoned. I saw how this was done with my own eyes.'

From praying to raiding – daily life in the *wajo*

A very different eyewitness account of life in the *wajo* comes from Father Gregorio de Cespedes SJ, who went to Korea in the winter of 1594/95 in the capacity of visiting chaplain to the Christians among the Japanese troops. He was first based at Ungcheon, which he describes in the first of two letters sent from Korea:

> The fortress of Komangai is impregnable, and great defensive works have been erected there, which are admirable, considering the short time in which they were completed. They have built high walls, watchtowers and strong bastions, at the foot of which all the nobles and soldiers of Augustin [Konishi Yukinaga], his subjects and allies are encamped. For all there are well built and spacious. Houses with stone walls are built for the chiefs.



The well-preserved site of Gijang Harbour, looking down from the hill on which the *wajo* was built.



The sloping stone wall of the keep of Gijang, typical of the native Japanese design imported into Korea as the *wajo*.

In his second letter he adds that Ungcheon is built 'on a very high and craggy slope. When I have to go down for some confessions at night, it gives me much work, and when I go back I ride a horse and rest many times on the way.' The solidity of the *wajo* was echoed by their interior decor, and when Father Gregorio visited So Yoshitomo,'I was astonished to see the beautiful things he has; they surely did not seem to be of temporary use but looked as if they were intended to stay there all one's life.' This would have been at Jama, Ungcheon's support castle. The Korean winter was, however, an enormous trial to him:

> The cold in Korea is very severe and without comparison with that of Japan. All day long my limbs are half benumbed, and in the morning I can hardly move my hands to say mass, but I keep myself in good health; thanks to God and the fruit that our lord is giving.

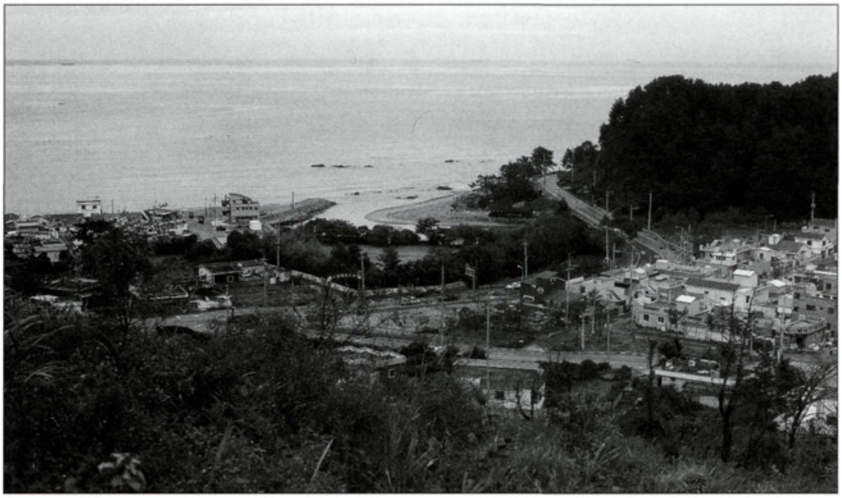
At Gijang he visited Kuroda Nagamasa, whose Christian piety comes in for special praise. His men listened to two sermons a day, and in the case of Nagamasa himself:

> In order to meditate on them at his leisure, he withdrew each day at certain hours, which were set aside for this purpose, to read his books of devotion ... Being such a great lord and such a leading soldier and commander, and busy in affairs of war, never did he abstain from fasting all the days ordered by the Church, without counting others which he added on account of his devoutness, all of which he accompanied with the secret disciplines which he practised.

Father Gregorio concludes his brief correspondence with some perceptive observations of life in the *wajo*:

> All these Christians are very poor, and suffer from hunger, cold, illness and other inconveniences very different from conditions in other places. Although Hideyoshi sends food, so little reaches here that it is impossible to sustain all with them, and moreover the help that comes from Japan is insufficient and comes late. It is now two months since ships have come, and many crafts were lost.

A view from the site of Imrangpo, a fortress on the east coat of Korea of which very little remains.



Illness took its toll of high and low alike, and one of Yi Sunsin's reports notes, 'The Japanese in Ungcheon took new positions, stationing 1,000 men or 800–900 men in each place. Many of them have died of illness or fled home while undergoing hardships in building houses and city walls.' In another report on the Ungcheon actions, he noted that 'the enemy's fighting strength has recently been greatly weakened with many war dead and wounded'. Infectious diseases were rife in the Japanese army and had already claimed many lives. A letter sent home by Date Masamune reports an outbreak of beriberi, which killed eight out of ten sufferers, and in another letter three days later he refers to deaths occurring 'because the water in this country is different', which may imply an outbreak of cholera.

Ill-treated inhabitants of the *wajo* sometimes made their grievances felt, and on 16 February 1596 Yi reports hearing of a 'conspiracy to mutiny in the Japanese camp'. Some actually deserted and went over to the Korean side. Admiral Yi notes in his diary on 14 November 1595 that a group of renegade Japanese were employed to plaster the ceiling of his headquarters! Three months later we read:

> Early in the morning five surrendered Japanese entered camp. On being questioned about the reasons for their escape, they explained that their commanding officer was a cruel fellow, driving them hard, so they ran away and surrendered. The large and small swords in their possession were collected and put away in the attic of the pavilion. They further confessed that they were not Japanese from Busan but Japanese under the command of Shimazu on Gadeok Island.

There is an extraordinary entry in Yi's diary, which reads:

> After dark the surrendered Japanese played a drama with the make-up of actors and actresses. As Commanding Admiral, I could not attend, but since the submissive captives wished to entertain themselves with their native farce for enjoyment of the day, I did not forbid it.

Yet life in a *wajo* was not all misery. Some samurai performed the tea ceremony, played *go*, and generally tried to behave as if they were back in Japan. As the *Wakizaka ki* (the chronicle of the Wakizaka family) notes, 'It was very peaceful inside our camps, so on occasions some people amused themselves by putting on *sarugaku* [comical theatrical] performances. Others danced, or passed the time with tea ceremonies and the pleasures of drinking bouts.' Of all the activities in

which the occupying forces indulged themselves, none was more dramatic than tiger hunting, but aside from these diversions there were numerous raids on Korean settlements, and one of Yi's reports from 1594 reads, 'They kill, rape and steal in a more cruel manner than before.'

But not all these incidents were everything that they seemed to be. Yi's diary entry concerning one such raid in 1593 says that, 'the supposed Japanese were found to be a large group of Korean refugees fleeing from Gyeongsang province, who, having disguised themselves like the Japanese war dogs, plundered private homes as they ran amok in all parts of the town'. In October 1597 Yi's diary noted:

> During breakfast some Dangpo abalone divers stole the cattle in the field with the false alarm, 'The Japanese thieves have come! The Japanese thieves have come!' Since I knew it was a ruse I had two fellows among the shouting false alarmists arrested and ordered their heads to be cut off and hung up high for a public warning. The sailors and people calmed down.

Most incidents, however, were unquestionably Japanese raids. In March 1594 we read of 'torch-bearing robbers' haunting Haeundae, the beach area near Busan, and five enemy sailors being apprehended and one killed at Nokdo.

Watching the *wajo*

During the occupation Japan and China were theoretically at peace, and talks were continuing, a situation that was particularly frustrating to the Koreans. Admiral Yi Sunsin longed for the opportunity to attack the *wajo*, but knew he could not do it without Chinese support:

> Though I swore with other captains of war to avenge our slaughtered countrymen upon the enemy by risking our own lives, and we pass many days on land and at sea in this resolution, the enemy has taken his positions in deep trenches and high fortresses on steep hills inaccessible to us.

A month later, however, Yi disregarded any possible Chinese qualms and made a demonstration outside Jangmunpo, but there was no reaction from on land so the Koreans simply burned two Japanese ships. A few days later he attacked Jangmunpo again, having made a useful alliance with some very effective Korean ground troops:



The lower walls of Seosaengpo that once protected the immediate harbour area.



Ungcheon: the development of a castle town



This corner tower at Okayama Castle has several decorative features, but is a very basic construction such as would have been seen in Korea. We see the graceful sloping roof, but little else in the form of unnecessary ostentation. The tower is also firmly anchored to the surrounding long white walls.

> I ordered out several hundred sharpshooters to land at Jangmunpo to challenge the enemy. Late in the day I led our central force to the scene of battle for a joint action on sea and land. Much frightened, the disheartened enemy hordes scattered and ran.

Yi continued to monitor troop movements and analyse intelligence reports. In April 1595 he notes receiving information that 'Hideyoshi has resolved to send more reinforcements across the sea in order to build permanent forts and barracks at Busan', but this is followed by reports concerning the evacuation of the three forts on Geoje Island in August. This indicated to Yi that the occupation forces were being concentrated into fewer areas, but there were still occasional armed clashes, and during the first month of 1596 a Japanese ship trying to land was driven away by Yi's blockading force.

The *wajo* as economic centres

Throughout the time of occupation the Korean Navy, assisted by guerrilla bands, largely succeeded in achieving the Korean government's overall aim of keeping the Japanese confined to barracks. It would appear that Hideyoshi was quite content to accept the status quo, with no advance being made by Japanese troops while peace negotiations continued. As a result, the areas immediately adjacent to the *wajo* remained the only pieces of Korean territory that could be regarded as 'occupied'. It would, however, be a mistake to regard the *wajo* as isolated fortresses hemmed in by hostile troops. In some cases Korean people who had initially fled before the Japanese advance returned to the *wajo* and settled nearby to work the land. They accepted Japanese rule and paid taxes to Japanese tax collectors. At its height Gimhae Jukdo was surrounded by over 600 houses, and trade flourished at Ungcheon. Ungcheon had a market and was extremely prosperous, giving the area directly adjacent to the *wajo* the appearance of a castle town.

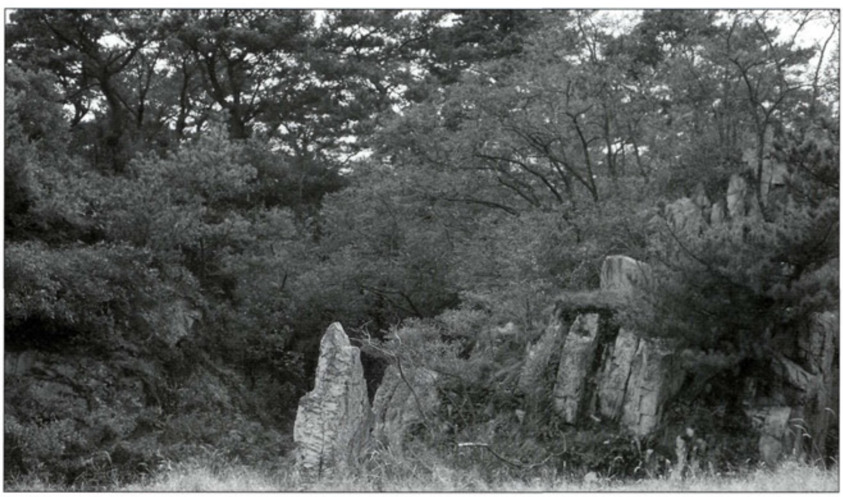
OPPOSITE **Ungcheon: the development of a castle town**
An interesting phenomenon of the *wajo* was the fact that even though they were partly intended as a means of controlling the population, castle towns grew up around them. Here we see one such example at Ungcheon, where residential and commercial properties have been created around the edge of the harbour under the watchful gaze of the *wajo*.

Operational history

The revelation of strength: Busan 1592

In September 1592 Admirai Yi Sunsin carried out a brave attempt to destroy the Japanese fleet lying at anchor in Busan. Before this time Yi had not dared venture to the east of Gadeok Island, and the scale of the challenge facing the Korean fleet at Busan is quite amazing. In none of his previous victories had Yi had to contend with more than 100 enemy ships at any one time, but his arrival off Busan revealed an enemy armada of over 400 vessels. 'Yi Okki and I roared, "Do or die!" and waved our war flags,' writes Yi in his report to the Korean court. Four Japanese ships lying outside the main anchorage became easy targets, but when the Korean fleet sailed in closer they came under heavy fire both from the ships themselves and from shore batteries, and Yi realized to his dismay that the *wajo* in Busan had been equipped with cannon seized from captured Korean castles, because 'cannon balls the size of Chinese quinces, or large stones as big as rice bowls' came flying over. Yi returned fire, and managed to silence the shore positions.

Yi also lamented the death of Cheong Un, a captain from Nokdo, who was killed by being hit by 'a large fire ball of the enemy', which implies that among the artillery pieces acquired by the Japanese were some specimens of the mortars with delayed-action fuses. Alternatively the expression could mean the simple fire bombs used in Japanese naval warfare that were flung by hand or with the help of a net on a pole to give greater range. Five captured Korean cannon are mentioned in Yi's list of weapons taken from captured Japanese ships. Two were 'earth mark' cannon, and two of the others were of the 'black' variety. In the end Yi's concern for the local inhabitants, together with the size of the Japanese fleet, prevented Busan from being a more complete victory than it actually was. Yi was wise enough to realize that an operation like Busan could only be really effective if he was acting with the support of ground troops, and as of September 1592 such an action was not yet possible. But to the Japanese the repulse of the attack was a revelation. It proved that the *wajo* were effective in the role they had been given: that of defending a harbour against attack.



These jagged rocks once protruded from the sea at the entrance to the harbour of Seosaengpo.

The vindication: Ungcheon 1593

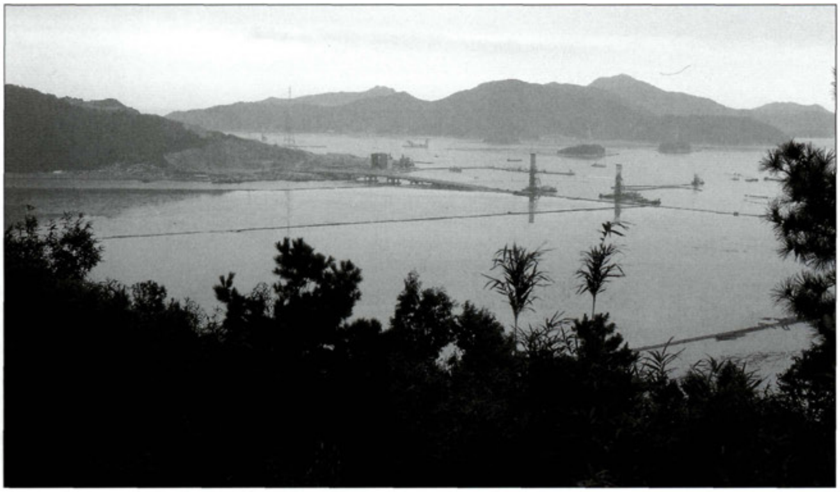


Early in 1593, while Seoul was being reclaimed by the Ming Army, Admiral Yi Sunsin had been patrolling the sea around Gadeok and Geoje Islands and observed large Japanese troops concentrations around Ungcheon, where ships were gathering and fortifications were being built. No Japanese warship was tempted to come out and engage the Korean fleet, so Yi went on to the offensive and launched his first assault on Ungcheon on 12 March.

> Our warships darted forward with one accord from right and left while shooting cannonballs and arrows like thunder and lightning. This was done twice a day, killing the enemy robbers in countless numbers.

Over four successive raids on Ungcheon, Yi inflicted much damage from a distance, but his reports also record his frustration at being unable to do more. For example, during his third raid he notes with satisfaction the performance of a turtle ship, whose crew killed 100 Japanese. The casualties included the commander, who was pierced through by one of the large wooden arrows fired from a cannon. Set against this is his clear exasperation at the absence of Korean or Chinese ground troops with whom he could have carried out a combined operation. In spite of several requests the only response was the arrival of Gwak Jaeu's guerrillas, whose small force Yi regarded as insufficient. Yi therefore mounted a limited amphibious operation of his own. 'I ordered out a dozen warships manned by monk captains and sharpshooters to make landings at strategic points,' he writes, 'our valiant monk soldiers jumped up brandishing swords and thrusting spears and charged into the enemy positions, shooting guns and arrows from morning to night.'

A view of the inner area of Ungcheon at the top of the hill, looking up at the remains of the 'great wall'.



The view from the site of the keep of Ungcheon, looking over the sea towards the site of Angolpo. Within the next decade the two places will be joined together by a massive land reclamation project.

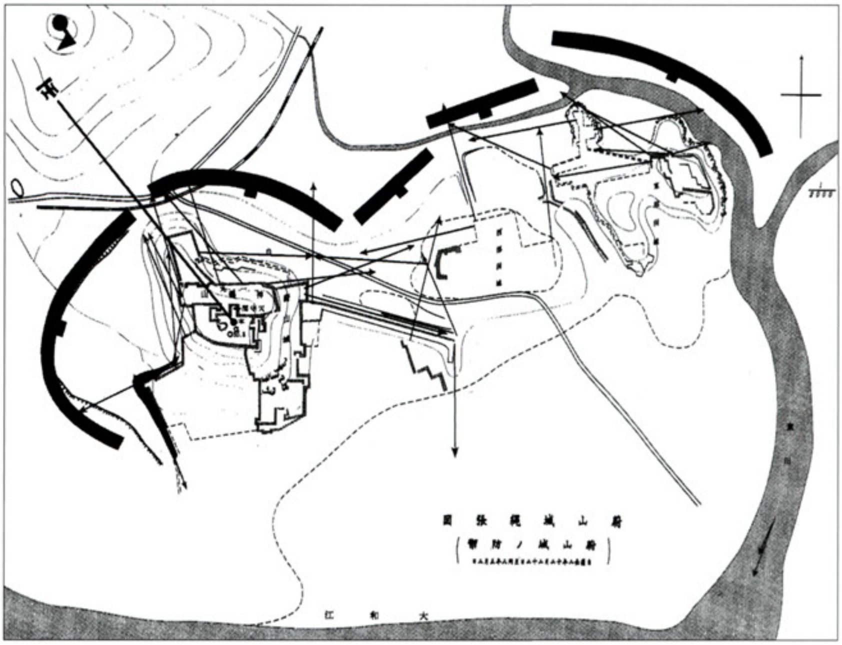
Busan: defending a harbour against attack

This plate shows the attack on Busan Harbour by Admiral Yi in 1592. The old Korean defences of the harbour have been augmented by Japanese construction, some of it quite rudimentary. We also see the characteristic curtained area called *maku* used on Japanese battlefields. The Japanese defenders have mounted captured Korean cannon on makeshift gun carriages and await the onslaught.





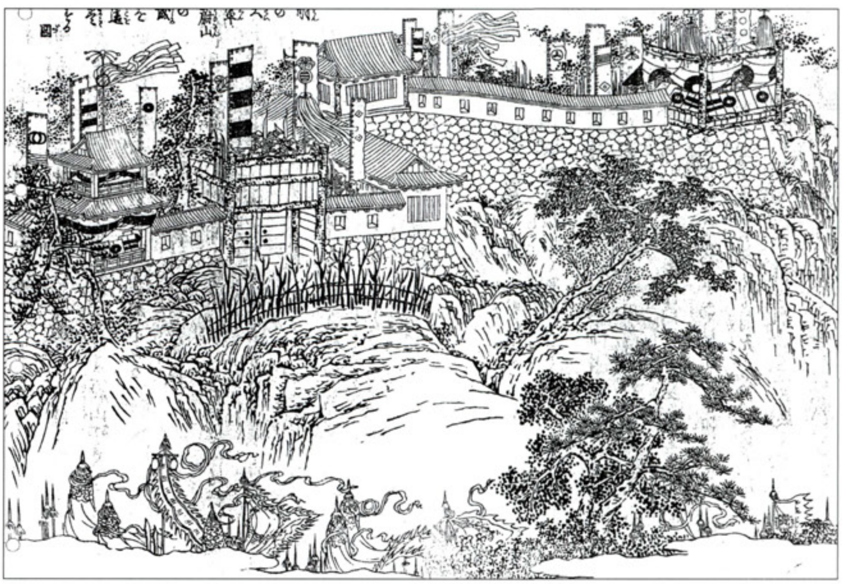
A redrawing of a remarkable contemporary document showing the firing angles and ranges available in the defence of the *wajo* of Ulsan.



The most exasperating aspect of the situation was the evidence before his own eyes that the Japanese Army was in a very sorry state and could have been easily swept into the sea, but once again the strong defensive qualities of the *wajo* had been demonstrated.

The ultimate test: Ulsan 1598

The siege of Ulsan was the largest operation ever conducted against a *wajo*, and its defence is more remarkable when one considers that at the time of the Chinese attack it was still unfinished. The *wajo* of Ulsan lay on a broad river estuary, which gave easy access to the sea. Kato Kiyomasa delegated its defence to a garrison of about 7,000 men and returned to Seosaengpo. Work began at a furious pace in late November 1597 to make a strong castle out of the prominent hill about 50m in height that overlooked the river, so squads of Japanese began

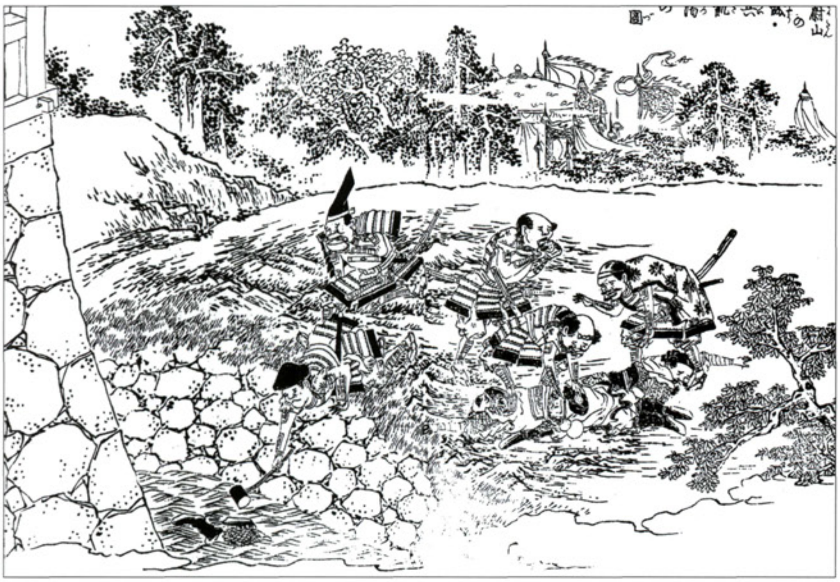


The Ming Army lays siege to the *wajo* of Ulsan. Good detail of fortifications is included in this section from the *Ehon Taikoki*. We see the typical stone bases, the long white walls, and the crude timber gateway towers with brushwood fencing for an outer defence.

raising earthworks and ditches, cladding the sides of the hill in stone, and building fences and barracks from timber cleared from nearby forests. By early January 1598 the increasingly severe winter weather was beginning to hinder the construction work, and the arrival of the Ming just before dawn on 29 January 1598 was to find a large proportion of the Japanese army still encamped in the flimsy barracks outside Ulsan's enceinte. Having been advised by their scouts that the Japanese defences were still incomplete, a Chinese flying squad was sent on ahead of the main body to do as much damage as possible. Fire arrows hit the temporary barracks buildings, which soon caught fire. The monk Keinen was fortunate in being well inside Ulsan Castle when the dawn attack on the outside camp happened. 'At the Hour of the Dragon smoke was rising on the eastern side of the castle, and I could hear the sounds of gunfire. The Chinese had advanced and set fire to the huts of the troops from Chugoku.'

The survivors of the night attack took refuge within Ulsan's incomplete walls while rearguard actions held off the attackers. The pursuit of the stragglers continued up to the unfinished gates. Footsoldiers fired arquebuses from the ramparts to cover the withdrawal, but the Chinese 'were not discouraged by this, and, trampling over the corpses, forced their way in', and the bar of the gate broke under the weight of the soldiers climbing over it. To divert the Chinese attack another gate of the castle was opened and a sally was made on to the Ming flank. As the two armies separated firing began again, which finally drove back the Chinese. They made no further advance against Ulsan that day, but contented themselves with burning down the temporary barracks and then withdrew. The success was reported back to the Korean government, whose ministers were pleased at the news, although it was stressed that Seosaengpo was a more important target than temporary Ulsan.

The situation inside Ulsan was not encouraging. The garrison had no more than three days' supply of food, and another major attack was expected. A messenger had been sent to Seosaengpo to inform Kato Kiyomasa of the situation, and his response was swift. After despatching a request to Busan for reinforcements, Kato Kiyomasa sailed to Ulsan. During the assault that followed Keinen found himself in the thick of the fighting for the first time, and gives us a vivid eyewitness description of how 'the castle was surrounded by countless numbers of troops, who were deployed in a number of rings that encircled us. There were so many of them covering the ground that one could no longer distinguish between the plain and the hills.' Because some of the



The desperate defenders of Ulsan sneak out by night to drink water from the polluted moat, and to search the pockets of dead Ming soldiers for grains of rice (From the *Ehon Taikoki*).


Ulsan: the winter siege



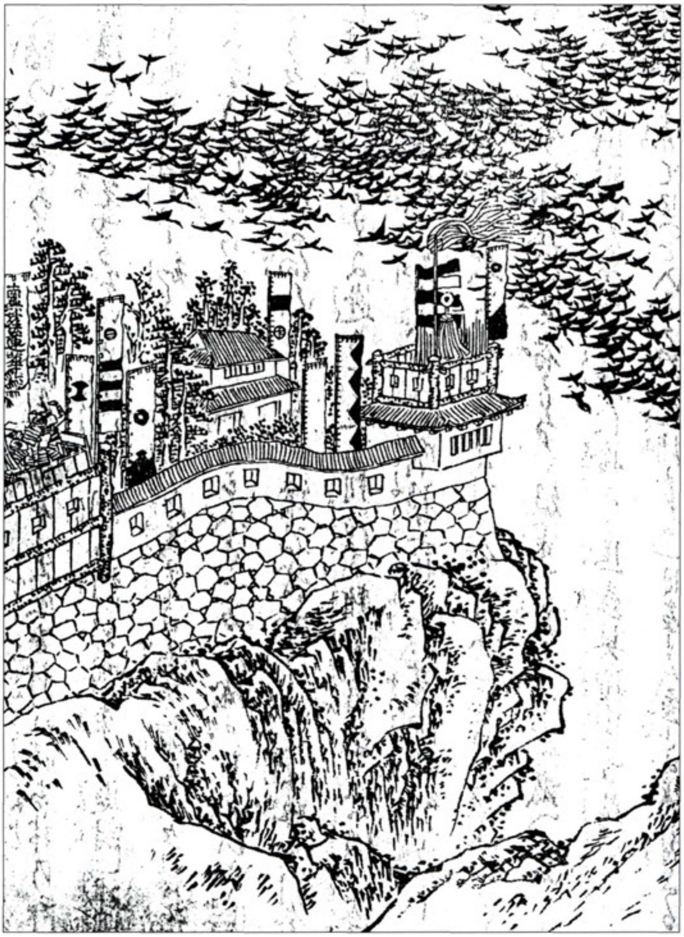
A comparatively simple gatehouse is shown here at Kubota Castle in Akita in northern Japan.

gates were still missing the Chinese were able to swarm inside the outer baileys, and began loosing fire arrows from outside the walls. The result was that the bedding, storage boxes and many other 'treasured possessions' went up in flames. The smoke was so dense that the defenders could not keep their eyes or mouths open, and thousands of labourers who were late returning to the castle were caught in the conflagration and died. By now thousands of Chinese soldiers were climbing up the walls. They were eventually driven back, but at the cost of 660 Japanese casualties.

The defenders then shut the gates of the inner fortress, a small area now marked by the hill on which the ruins of Ulsan *wajo* now sit. Kato Kiyomasa could only wait for reinforcements, hoping that the awful weather might also help in persuading the Chinese to withdraw. The Ming set up siege lines to starve out the defenders, and watched all the approaches by land and sea in case of a relief attempt. Cannon were used, and might have proved decisive had the defenders' fire not prevented the gunners from transporting their heavy pieces even closer to the walls. One cannonball hit Kato Kiyomasa's bodyguard, cutting him so quickly in half at the waist that the part of his body below the waist was left standing.

Being unable to batter down the gates or to make a breach in the walls, the Chinese artillery tactics were replaced by human waves launched against the parapets. Terrifying assaults were delivered regularly over the next ten days. As one furious surge of men was driven back another wave swept up to replace it, the dead bodies of their predecessors taking the place of scaling ladders as they

OPPOSITE **Ulsan: the winter siege**
Contemporary accounts confirm two striking facts about the siege of Ulsan. First, that much of it took place under conditions of bitter cold and snow. Second, that the Chinese launched human wave attacks on the walls and used the dead bodies of their comrades in place of scaling ladders. This plate attempts to convey the awful reality of the fiercest campaign ever launched against a *wajo*.



Flocks of scavenging birds descend on the abandoned Chinese camp, a sign that the siege of Ulsan was finally over. (From the *Ehon Taikoki*).

clambered up the huge mound of corpses. 'They would put a large hook up on the wall and fifty or even a hundred men would take hold of the attached rope to pull the wall down,' wrote the author of *Matsui Monogatari* in some amazement. 'When this happened we fired on them from the side, but out of fifty men five or ten still hung on and pulled to the end. It has to be said that they are extremely brave warriors.' On one occasion a detachment of Koreans carrying shields and bundles of brushwood approached the outer bailey to make an arson attack on the palisade, but they were spotted and received volleys of arquebus balls for their pains. Concern was also expressed that the Japanese arquebus fire was being stopped by the solid Chinese shields, so to test them arquebuses were trained on the middle of the shields and it was noted at which range they could be pierced, as shown 'by the blood flowing'. The siege was witnessed by Yu Seongnyong, who writes in *Chingbirok*, 'Every day this kind of battle was repeated, and the bodies of Chinese soldiers and our own began to pile up under the walls of the fortress.'

As Ulsan had no well within the inner castle the torments of thirst were soon added to the intense discomfort of the fierce Chinese attacks. Water-gathering parties slipped out of the castle by night and brought back supplies from ponds choked with corpses. 'But just when we were really craving for water,' writes Keinen, 'it began raining heavily and everyone in the castle could wet their mouths. The water fell like shed tears on to their helmets, and we washed our hands in the water that cascaded over us.'

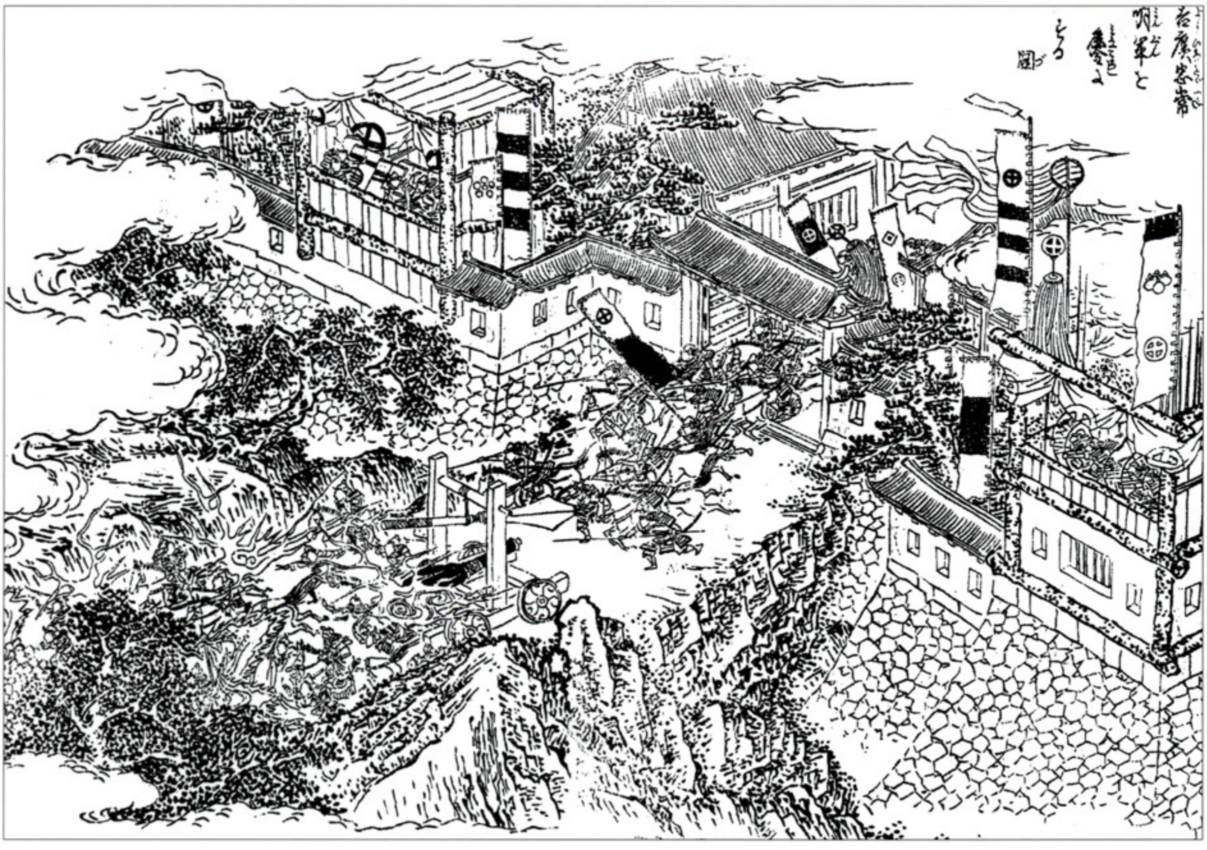
When the temperature dropped below freezing that night a strong wind arose that brought about a wind-chill factor so severe that it affected the fighting spirit on both sides. The pause in the attack, and the intense cold, made the defenders realize how tired they were. By now all food was practically exhausted except for roasted strips of meat cut from dead horses cooked over fires made from broken arrows, piles of which lay several feet deep. Foraging parties had been reduced to searching the bodies of dead Chinese for grains of rice. The following morning, fooled by the deceptive warmth of a brief spell of winter sunshine, the exhausted soldiers huddled in the sunny places on the ramparts and fell asleep. The *Chosen ki* tells us:

> Both friend and foe are silent. Nevertheless inside the castle we have maintained our defences by day and night without any sleep. Here and there inside the castle, at the sunny places on the walkways and at the foot of towers, with no distinction between samurai, *ashigaru* or labourers, 50 men at a time may be found crumpled under the unbearable hunger, thirst and cold. In addition there are a number of men who have let their heads drop and lie down to sleep. Other soldiers go on tours of inspection with their spears, and when they try to rouse men who have not moved all day by using the butt end of a spear, the ones who stay completely bent over have been frozen to death.

The conditions made both sides ready to parley, and the resulting offer by the Ming of a ceasefire was accepted by Kato Kiyomasa as a way of buying time, because the plight of Ulsan was now known to the rest of the Japanese Army. Mori Yoshinari, accompanied by ten samurai, sailed round from Seosaengpo and rowed up the river as far as was possible, where they waved their banners towards the ramparts, hoping that they had been seen. Two days later a large scouting force arrived in the estuary to identify a suitable landing place for a relieving army. They disembarked briefly on some high ground and again waved flags towards the castle. This time they were definitely noticed, and the garrison waved back to them. 'I was resigned to my fate,' writes Keinen, 'when at early dawn we saw the tips of the banners, and there was much rejoicing.' Greatly relieved at the sight, Kato Kiyomasa broke off his negotiations with the Ming, who resolved to make one final attempt to take Ulsan before the new army advanced upon them. Keinen watched in some excitement as the night attack unfolded:

> From early dawn they attacked anew, loosing fire arrows and firing arquebuses and cannon, and set up scaling ladders at places where they could climb the stone walls. We threw down pine torches, cut down their climbing implements and fired at them.

Soon intelligence reached the Chinese command of the huge relieving army that was approaching from behind them. The newcomers fell on their rear, and the result was a considerable Japanese victory. As dawn broke the following morning the defenders of Ulsan were heartened by the welcome sight of flocks of scavenging birds descending upon the now abandoned Chinese camp. The siege of Ulsan was over.



The Chinese attack on the main gate of Sacheon, showing the moment when there was an explosion that destroyed, among other things, the combination cannon and battering ram that was being used to breach the entrance. (From the *Ehon Taikoki*).


Suncheon: the final siege



The view from the *wajo* of Sacheon, the site of a fierce siege conducted against the Shimazu family. We are looking out over the sea where Admiral Yi Sunsin had one of his first naval victories in 1592.

The finished product: Sacheon 1598

The siege of Ulsan convinced many within the Japanese High Command that a withdrawal from Korea was the only course of action. Yet troops were to stay in their *wajo* throughout 1598, even though many were withdrawn, and only ten generals out of the 30 who had been involved in the second invasion remained in Korea by the time of Hideyoshi's death in September.

The allies realized that a major push against the *wajo* would dislodge the Japanese permanently, and Sacheon provided the penultimate battle. The *wajo* of Sacheon was built on a promontory where it overlooked the harbour and provided a safe anchorage. The approach to it was a narrow path, just as the Japanese preferred. Sacheon was defended by the Shimazu of Satsuma province in southern Kyushu under Shimazu Yoshihiro and his son Tadatsune (later to be known as Iehisa). Other Satsuma retainers held four small outposts to the north, including the old castle of Sacheon. There is an amusing anecdote concerning the building of Sacheon in *Jozan Kidan*, which tells of an argument between the veteran Chosokabe Motochika and a younger samurai about where to place the gun ports in the *wajo*'s gatehouse. Chosokabe maintained that gun ports should be inserted 'at a level between a man's chest and hips'. His colleague disagreed, saying that gun ports should be placed high up on the walls, because low gun ports would allow enemy scouts to peer into the *wajo*. 'Let them!' was Chosokabe's reaction, 'then they can see how strong it is!'

OPPOSITE **Suncheon: the final siege**

It is 1598 and the mighty *wajo* of Suncheon is attacked in a combined operation by the Korean fleet under the sea walls at a distance and Chinese siege weaponry on the land side. This plate shows the latter operation, with the Chinese using a cloud ladder and a movable screen. Suncheon did not fall, but the success was immaterial, and within a very short time it was abandoned and the Japanese defenders sailed for home.



The harbour area of the *wajo* of Suncheon, the site of the Chinese amphibious attack that went so disastrously wrong. It was also from this place that the final withdrawal from Korea was begun in 1598.

When the Chinese approached the lines Shimazu Yoshihiro evacuated all three forward positions for the new *wajo*. Young Shimazu Tadatsune was for making an immediate attack, but his father forbade it. He reasoned that the Chinese Army would wish to waste no time in attacking anyway, and the men of Satsuma were ready for them. This assumption proved to be correct, and the Ming Army, in three units of right, left and centre, moved in for an attack at about 0600hrs on 30 October 1598 with a total of 36,700 troops. The Shimazu father and son monitored their movements from the two towers that flanked the eastern gate. Under strict orders from Yoshihiro, the Japanese held their fire, and as one or two men fell dead from Chinese arrows Tadatsune was again for launching an attack, but once more his father urged caution.

By now the Chinese were approaching the walls, and were also attacking the main gate with a curious siege engine. *Seikan roku* calls it a 'wooden lever', while the chronicler of Kawakami's Korean campaign talks of 'gunpowder jars'. It was probably a combination of an iron-tipped battering ram mounted on a carriage with a cannon. The joint effects of cannonball and ram smashed the gate, and soon thousands of Chinese soldiers were milling round the entrance and climbing up the castle walls. 'Lord Yoshihiro, who saw this, gave the order to attack without delay,' writes a commentator on behalf of the Shimazu, 'and all the soldiers as one body fired their arquebuses and mowed down the enemy soldiers who were clinging on to the walls.'

At that precise moment there was an enormous explosion in the allied ranks. Japanese accounts claim that they had managed to destroy the combined ram and cannon, causing its stock of gunpowder to explode with great fury right in the middle of the Ming host. A separate Shimazu chronicle implies that the engine was destroyed by a firebomb thrown from a mortar or a catapult, because:

> We flung fire against the gunpowder jars, many of which had been placed within the enemy ranks. It flew from one jar to another, and the tremendous noise was carried to our ears. Consequently the alarming sound terrified all of the enemy who were in the vicinity.

Chinese accounts state that the explosion was caused by the accidental ignition of the Japanese gunpowder store as a certain Peng Xingu forced his way in through the smashed gate. Whatever the reason, the explosion proved

to be the turning point of the battle. Seeing the confusion in the Chinese ranks, Shimazu Yoshihiro led out his men in a tremendous charge. Many Chinese were cut down, but with admirable organization and discipline the army regrouped on a nearby hill and took the fight back to the Japanese. Some Japanese units had now become detached from the main body, and although at risk from a Chinese attack they quickly realized their opportunity and attacked the rear ranks of the Chinese where the poorest quality troops were stationed. Soon the Ming baggage carriers had broken and were causing unintentional havoc in their own ranks. Yet still the fight continued, and the Shimazu remained outnumbered by three to one until the approach of a relieving army from Tachibana's *wajo* at Goseong tipped the balance in Japan's favour. Thousands of Chinese were killed or pursued back as far as the Nam River, where very few stragglers managed to cross and reach the safety of Jinju.

Once again a battle had been lost, and Sacheon has usually been trumpeted as Japan's greatest victory over Ming China, but the real victory came shortly afterwards and was a Chinese one. In spite of the enormous Chinese losses, remembered today by the huge burial mound at Sacheon, the siege continued, and it was not long before the isolated garrison decided to withdraw as part of the overall evacuation from Korea that was now inevitable. The Shimazu slipped out of the *wajo*'s harbour, leaving an empty castle for the Chinese. The sacrifice had been terrible, but Korea was almost free.

Combined operations: Suncheon 1598

Suncheon had long been the finest remaining *wajo* in Korea. It held 13,700 men, and was well supplied with food and ammunition. Almost 500 ships lay at anchor in the harbour, waiting for the moment when they could safely evacuate the Japanese army. The operation against Suncheon was designed to be a combined land and sea operation between the Chinese Western Army and the naval commands of Admiral Yi and his Ming ally Chen Lin. Relations between the two admirals had not always been cordial, but there was sufficient cooperation for the joint fleet to secure Jang Island, which lay within sight of Suncheon Castle and on which the Japanese had stored some equipment and provisions. The fleet then proceeded to surround the *wajo* and sat there as a floating siege line while the Ming Army made similar preparations on land.

The other arm of the attack on Suncheon was to see the employment by General Liu Ting of a weird and wonderful collection of Chinese siege engines, including movable shields, siege towers and the so-called 'cloud ladders': wheeled vehicles from which a hinged ladder could be folded out to hook on to a wall. The assembly and installation of these heavy contraptions took several days before the combined operation was ready to be set in motion. Supremely confident, Liu Ting offered 60 gold pieces to any Chinese soldier who brought him a Japanese head.

On the same day as the battle of Sacheon, the two forces made their final preparations for an attack at dawn the next day. 'At 6.00 am we opened an all-out attack,' wrote Yi, 'our naval craft advanced to the very front and fought the enemy until noon, inflicting countless casualties upon him. In this battle we also suffered some losses.' While the two navies bombarded Suncheon from the sea, the Chinese soldiers slowly heaved the cloud ladders and siege towers towards the land walls. Fierce and accurate arquebus fire meant that few of these lumbering monsters got through to clamp their hooks against Suncheon's parapets, and those that did were met by desperate resistance. Realizing how much faith the Chinese were placing in their siege machines, Konishi Yukinaga's men dared to sally out of the gates and take on the operatives in hand-to-hand fighting. The lack of an alternative plan of assault was soon made plain. With their siege engines stranded and useless the Chinese pulled back to their lines, while on the sea the turn of the tide provided its own contribution to a temporary allied withdrawal, and the bombardment ceased.



The main gate of Suncheon leading into the inner bailey.

Frustrated by this reversal on land, Liu Ting sent a message to Admiral Chen Lin suggesting a night attack on Suncheon from the sea. Admiral Yi had grave misgivings about the proposal, but Chen Lin was determined, so Yi was forced to provide support for the Chinese advance. Timing the assault to coincide with the incoming tide just after midnight, Chen Lin rowed in and opened up a close-range bombardment with heavy cannon, which knocked out a considerable section from the Japanese palisades. But within an hour the tide turned, and 30 Chinese ships ran aground. Not realizing that the beaching of the Chinese ships was a mistake, the Japanese troops interpreted the accident as a dramatic attempt at an amphibious landing that had no doubt been timed to coincide with a night attack from the land. The Chinese soldiers on board, however, had no such intentions, and sat there in great fear while they waited for the tide to rise and free them.

The Japanese succeeded in capturing five Chinese ships, and when the tide rose the garrison of Suncheon launched raids against other vessels as they pulled back. The samurai were only driven off when Yi's ships went to Chen Lin's rescue. The following morning Yi prepared for an attack of his own, but a strong westerly wind blew up and prevented any approach being made for the next two days. Yi was then told that General Liu Ding, who had no doubt been informed of the simultaneous disaster at Sacheon, had abandoned the last ever siege of a *wajo* and retreated north. Yet within days Suncheon was evacuated anyway as the curtain came down on the Korean invasion.

Aftermath

The *wajo* and the war's outcome

Although all three of the great sieges of 1598 against the *wajo* were individual failures in that they involved military defeats for the Chinese and Korean armies, they played their part in securing the overall objective of forcing a Japanese withdrawal from Korea. By confining the Japanese to the security of the *wajo* the allies had prevented them from launching attacks and gradually wore them down by a process of attrition. Had Busan not been secured so well the Japanese might have been expelled earlier. What the *wajo* had given the Japanese was time, and it had been clearly demonstrated that their design was so strong that none could be overcome by force of arms. Throughout the whole of the Korean operation no *wajo* was ever captured, yet in spite of this it was also appreciated that the only parts of Korean territory that Japan would ever own would be the *wajo* themselves. This finally swayed the commanders who were forced to defend them and did their duty so well. In time this fact was appreciated by Hideyoshi himself, although because of his deteriorating mental condition the command to withdraw had to wait for his death.

The influence of the *wajo* on Japanese castle design

The two decades subsequent to the Japanese return from Korea saw a tremendous spurt in castle construction in Japan. The experience of three massive sieges had vindicated the faith the Japanese had put in their own style of castle, so we look in vain for any change of direction in Japanese castle design arising out of the Korean experience. Castles certainly grew in size, but this was a trend that was well under way even before the Korean campaign began. In essence the Korean War confirmed the suitability for Japanese purposes of Japanese castles, a situation that was only to be shaken by the last great siege of a Japanese castle at



The view from the *wajo* of Suncheon looking inland.



The excavated ditch around Hachigata Castle shows how a simple earthwork could be enhanced by using angles and a very plain sharpened stake palisade. This would have been the norm for the outer works of the *wajo*.

Osaka in 1614–15, when European cannon were brought to bear upon a Japanese castle for the first time and played a decisive role. But this was over a decade in the future, and of far greater consequence for the appearance of Japanese castles was the effect of the new requirement enforced by the Tokugawa subsequent to 1603 that a castle should serve a political purpose in addition to its military functions. The result of this was that many castles were demolished and replaced by one large central provincial headquarters.

Apart from any lessons concerning castle design, the crucial lessons the *wajo* had provided were concerned with the means of resisting massive sieges. Kato Kiyomasa, who had played such a prominent part in the Korean campaign, enlarged and strengthened his base at Kumamoto, but the influence of the years that Kiyomasa spent on campaign were more subtle. They lie in the food supplies growing in the baileys in the form of nut trees, and the strange innovation of using vegetable stalks to stuff the *tatami* mats, so that in dire emergency the garrison could eat the floor they walked upon! These were lessons learned from defending Ulsan, applying sound defensive techniques to what was now fully accepted as the ideal fortress design. The innovations were never tested during Kiyomasa's lifetime, but Kumamoto was put to the ultimate test in 1870, when the conscripts of the newly formed Imperial Japanese Army were besieged by the troops of the Satsuma Rebellion. The ghost of Kato Kiyomasa must have smiled upon the scene as his magnificent castle withstood sustained attacks from samurai armed with modern weapons, but who also climbed up the walls, sword in hand.

The influence of the *wajo* on Korean castle design

It might be thought that the bitter experience of the defeat of the Korean castles in 1592, and the repulse of three massive attacks against the *wajo* in 1598, would have led to a revolution in Korean castle design. But this did not happen, even though far-sighted statesmen such as Yu Seongnyong applied their minds to the vexed question of wall construction and maintenance. Musing on the subject by the banks of the river near Anju while the Japanese were ravaging his country, Yu came up with a proposal for walls that contained gun portals and towers separated by six or seven hundred paces, with a pile of cannon balls stacked ready beside the big guns 'like chicken's eggs':

> Then when the enemy approaches the walls, he will be hit by a cross fire from the guns. Not to speak of men and horses, even metal and stone could not escape being pulverized by this ... All you would have to do is to have several dozen men man the gun turrets, and the enemy would not dare draw near.

Had his ideas been adopted, and both time and the devastated Korean economy were clearly against him, then the returning Japanese in 1597 might have had to face strongly fortified towns. Namweon certainly had towers that allowed some flanking fire when the Japanese attacked it in 1597, but this was probably due to the rapid rebuilding carried out by the Chinese Army rather than as a result of Yu's recommendations. Instead a lack of will, and an even more acute lack of resources, meant that Korea faced the second invasion under the traditional policy of 'strengthen the walls and clear the countryside'.

Writing a century later, Yu Hyeongweon, the great reformer of the 17th century, was able to look back in despair on two Japanese invasions and the wars against the Manchus, and note sadly that in Korea, really, nothing ever changed:

> Once they hear that the enemy is coming, without waiting for the enemy to spread around, the whole country becomes an empty wasteland and the government has no one to whom it can issue orders. The fighting troops have nothing to fear or avoid: they just make it their business to take flight and scatter. Enemy bandit cavalry in groups of three or four men roam over all the eight provinces and plunder the country at will.

When the Japanese withdrew the Koreans merely continued their own style of castle building, and were to suffer a further demonstration of its weakness in 1627. The Koreans were closely allied to the Ming dynasty, who had helped them so much against the Japanese, and when the Manchus invaded China Korea stood fast to its loyalty. The Manchu Emperor invaded Korea and forced the king to flee to Kanghwa Island. He pledged allegiance, and the Manchus withdrew, but once safely back in Seoul the king repudiated his promise and began preparing for war. Fortresses on Kanghwa and the mountain castle of Namhansanseong were repaired and extended. In every case, however, the extra gates, merlons and walls were in pure Korean style. In January 1637 the Manchus invaded again. The king sent the royal family to Kanghwa Island, intending to follow himself, but the Manchus cut the road and forced the king to flee south to Namhansanseong. The mountain fortress was surrounded, and after a 45-day siege and with starvation looming the king surrendered.

Little occurred in the way of fortress building in Korea for the next century and a half; then in 1794 work began on the fortress of Hwaseong, which encircles the city of Suweon. The intention was to move the capital from Seoul to Suweon, and although this was never done the result was the production of one of the world's finest walled cities. Nearly all of it is intact and is a UNESCO World Heritage site, including the massive gates. The walls snake up the central mountain and then complete a defensive ring at a lower level. Again the style is all Korean, and many excellent defensive features may be noted. There are firearms bastions and stone lookout towers. There are floodgates and the very interesting beacon tower, with its beacon chimneys built into the top of the wall. But there are no levelled baileys like the *wajo*. Nor, even, is there any influence from 18th-century Europe, where the angle bastions of military architects like Vauban had become the norm and had spread to the Far East through colonial fortresses.

The *wajo* today

All the *wajo* sites are open to the public, although there is very little to see at some of them. Most are concentrated around the Busan area, so hiring a car is a very practical proposition, but it is important to know that South Korea is one of the few countries left in the world that still requires an International Driving Permit. The modern photocard/paper copy will not suffice!

Most international flights to Korea land at Seoul, from where it is an easy matter to take the new 'Bullet Train' to Busan. Busan is a fascinating place to visit in its own right with a new subway system that takes in nearly all the local *wajo* sites. Busan *wajo* and Jaseongdae are pleasant little parks in the middle of the city. Bakmungu and Dongsamdong have no remains, but their sites may be seen from the harbour. Dongnae offers the Chungyeolsa shrine and some very pleasant mountain walking along the ridge of the *wajo* hill with superb views. The dramatic Gupo is on the subway line, but a distant view of Gimhae Jukdo, Hopo and Yangsan will suffice.

Out on the east coast a car tour may be made through Gijang, with its exquisitely preserved harbour and 'mother' and 'child' castle sites. The remains of Imrangpo are only visible in winter, but further north is the magnificent Seosaengpo. The modern main road marks the location of the sea coast in 1592, from where a castle mound rises up beside the rocks that once were lapped with water. Behind this mound stretch long walls up to the summit with a fascinating combination of interlocked stone walls. Ulsan's small hill has little left to see, but is very evocative of the siege situation.

South Korea's hunger for land is having a very strange effect on the *wajo* of the Ungcheon area. Over a period of years Gadeok Island is being joined to the mainland by a massive civil engineering programme designed to create land for factories and an extension of Busan harbour. Much of the promontory on which Angolpo is built has already disappeared. Ungcheon's harbour is now enclosed by a new breakwater along which tipping lorries trundle, but the *wajo* site itself will be preserved, even if it will end at dry land on the outer side.

There is little to see at the *wajo* sites on Geoje Island, but a visit may be combined with trips to the battle sites and museums to Admiral Yi's victories at Okpo and Hansando. The sea voyage from Busan is very enjoyable. More memorials of Admiral Yi may be included in visits to the *wajo* that lie furthest to the west. Sacheon lies in an attractive position, approached past the huge Chinese burial mound. Not far away is the fine Korean fortress of Jinju. Namhae is reached across the suspension bridge that crosses the Noryang Straits, while Suncheon lies on the road towards Yeosu, where there is a full-scale replica of the turtle ship. Suncheon is one of the best *wajo* sites. A land creation project like the one at Ungcheon is now complete and has preserved the site completely. The ruins are well maintained, and a new road now passes it on the seaward side, allowing a visitor the opportunity to view the castle as it would have been seen by Chen Lin's fleet in 1598.

Bibliography

My main sources for the structure, history and appearance of the individual *wajo* are all in Japanese. Most important is the journal *Wajo no Kenkyu*, published by the Wajo Kenkyu Kai. Five volumes have been published so far. Each contains numerous articles in Japanese and Korean on the *wajo* with extensive photographs, maps and diagrams, with special attention being given to particular sites as follows:

Volume 1: Geoje Island (1997)
Volume 2: Suncheon, Ulsan (1998)
Volume 3: Busan, Gimhae Jukdo, Seosaengpo (1999)
Volume 4: Namhae, Busan (2000)
Volume 5: Seosaenpo, Ungcheon, Myeongdong (2002)

In 2005 the organization published the proceedings of a symposium that dealt with the relationship between the *wajo* and Osaka Castle. It is entitled *Chosen no wajo to Osaka jo*, and includes an excellent account of Gupo. Suncheon is covered in the volume in the Rekishi Gunzo Series called *Sengoku no Kenjo* (2004).

Of the few sources in European languages, the Jesuit eyewitness accounts of the *wajo* appear in Cory, Ralph M., 'Some notes on Father Gregorio de Cespedes: Korea's first European visitor', *Transactions of the Korean Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, (1937) pp. 1–45. Yi Sunsin's reports and diary are translated in Ha, Tae-hung, *Nanjung Ilgi (The War Diaries of Admiral Yi)* (Seoul, 1977) and Ha, Tae-hung (trans.), & Lee, Chong-young (ed.), *Imjin Changch'o (Admiral Yi's Memorials to Court)* (Seoul, 1981). Yu Seongnyong's *Chinbirok* is now available in English translation as *The Book of Corrections: Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea 1592–1598,* translated by Choi Byonghyon (Institute of East Asian Studies: Berkeley, 2002).

A full account of the Korean invasions appears in my book *Samurai Invasion: Japan's Korean War 1592–1598* (Cassells: London, 2002), where there is an extensive bibliography for Japanese sources. Since that book was published several important articles on the Korean campaign have been published. Kenneth Swope has been a particularly fine contributor because of his use of Chinese source material. See in particular 'Turning the Tide: The Strategic and Psychological Significance of the Liberation of Pyongyang in 1593', *War and Society* 21, (2003) pp. 1–22; and 'Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons: Military Technology Employed During the Sino-Japanese–Korean War, 1592–1598', *The Journal of Military History* 69 (2005) pp. 11–41.

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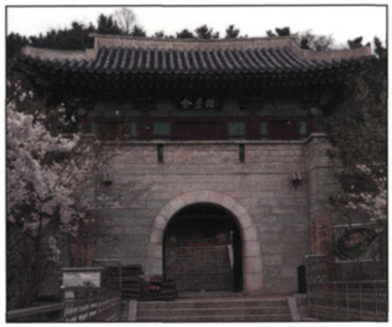
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